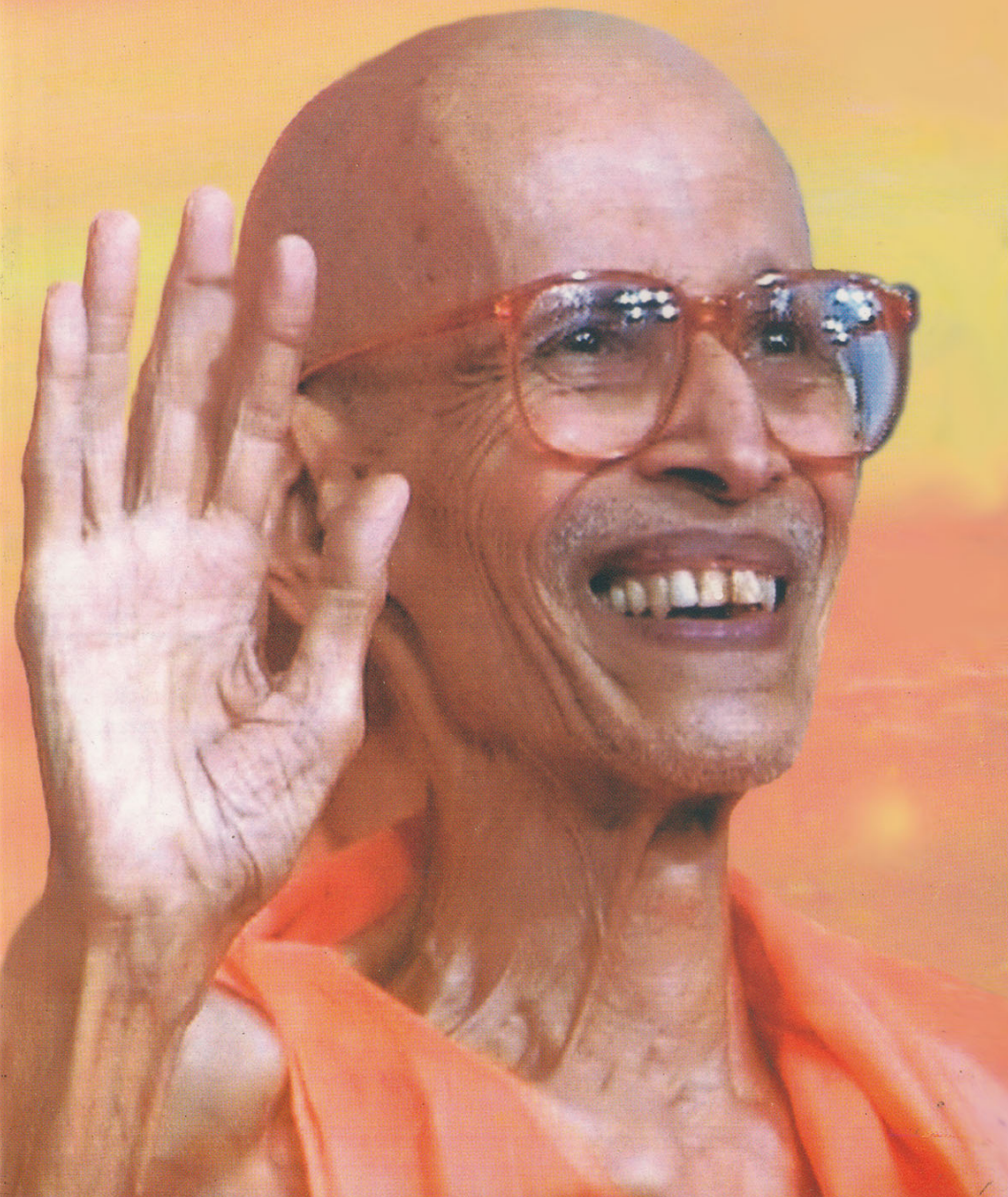
THE HOLY STREAM

THE INSPIRING LIFE STORY OF SWAMI CHIDANANDA



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The Inspiring Life-Story of Swami Chidananda

Sarat Chandra Behera, M.A., Ph.D.,
Profesor of History,
Sambalpur University

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AT THE FEET OF
THE EVER-EFFULGENT MASTER
SIVANANDA SWARUP
HIS HOLINESS
SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA SARASWATI MAHARAJ

"At the end of many births
the wise man comes to Me,
realising that all this is Vaasudeva
(the all-pervding One); such a great soul
(Mahatma) is rare, indeed."

Bhagavadgita: VII-19

ॐ

Rishikesh, U.P.
India.

Radiant Divinity!
Beloved Friend,

Homage Unto the Divine!
May God bless you! Peace be unto you!
Gurudev Swami Sivananda's choicest
blessings grant you highest spiritu-
-al Illumination.

Your life here is a
gift of God. It is a golden chance to
attain Divine Perfection which is your
birthright. Do not miss this rare
opportunity. Attain Divine Perfection
and thus fulfil your life's mission.

Purify your heart through
selfless Service. Control your mind & steady
it through devotion and daily worship.
Go beyond the darkness of Ignorance
through intense meditation. Realize the
Divine Reality and attain Bliss, Peace
and Illumination.

Link yourself with God. His
Divine qualities will flow into your nature
and transform it into Godliness. Become
a centre of Divinity and benefit all
mankind by your Divine Life of Love,
Compassion and Service!

All success to you! Swami Chidananda
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HUMBLE SUBMISSION

The author presents this life-story as a votive offering at the lotus feet of Gurudev Sri Swami Chidananda Saraswati. He is deeply grateful to the compassionate Master without whose kind blessings he could not have brought the work to its present shape. It is only through the Master's grace that this humble servant could venture to tackle the overwhelming task of capturing the myriad-sided, radiant effulgence of a grand divine life in the small compass of a volume such as this.

The author is grateful to Sri Swami Krishnanandaji, Sri Swami Venkatesanandaji, Sri Swami Pranavanandaji of Malaysia, Sri Swami Aseshananda, Mother Paula Cornely and Mother Yvonne Lebeau whose writings he has freely utilised in the present work. He owes a special measure of grateful thanks to Sri Swami Dhyanananda who inspired him to write this life-story by narrating some of his experiences with Swamiji.

The author is grateful to all the Purvashram relatives of Swamiji—particularly to the late Mother Gopi Bai of loving memory, Sri Venkat Rao, Sri Raghavendra Rao, Sri N. S. Rao, Dr. B. N. K. Sharma, Srimati Malati Bai, Srimati Padma Bai, Srimati Sudha Bai and Srimati Vatsala Bai—for supplying him information about the early life of the saint. They all belong to that great family which is distinguished and generous in more than one way. Their loving co-operation will ever be a cherished memory with the author.

Grateful thanks are due to Sri Devidas Girdharlal Chandarana, Sri V. R. Chakravarthi, Dr. Ramdas, Sri P. Chentsal Rao, Sri G. M. Manjunathayya, Sri Mizar Govind Pai, Sri K. Balkrishna Rao, Sri S. Shanmugam of Malaysia, Sri Swami Satchidananda and Brahmachari

Karmananda of Trinidad, Mother Shivpremananda of Worishofen- Dorschhausen, Sri Hans Franke of Porz Eil, Sri N. Balachandran and Sri M. Sivarasa of Ceylon, Dr. V. S. Mani, Sri N.S.V. Row, Sri Subbaramayya Naidu, Sri H. D. Sharma, Srimati Gopalraj Urs, late Sri S. C. Deboji of loving memory, Sri D. C. Choudhury, Sri C. R. Mohanty, Sri C. S. Das, Sri H. H. Mahapatra, Sri Mahesh Tripathi, Sri Kiran Shankar Tripathi, Mother Kamala Chopra, Mother Savitri Nilakanthan and Mother Nirmala Natarajan who have provided various informations and some rare photographs, which have been utilised in the biography.

The author is deeply beholden to all the gracious Sadhaks of Sivanandashram—particularly to Sri Swami Vimalananda, Sri D. Nagarkar, Sri Narasimhulu, late Sri Ramanna Rai and Sri Ramaswarup—who furnished various informations and extended kind co-operation in more than one way. He is specially grateful to his Gurubhai Dr. M. S. Pati, who lovingly joined this servant of Gurudev in the holy service of composing the present work.

Sri Ram Niwas Gupta, the esteemed President of the Divine Life Society, Eastern Zone, and worthy son of the late Revered Sri Kashiram Gupta, has all along been a great source of encouragement to the author. But for his devotion and dedication, the present work could not have seen the light of the day so soon. The author expresses his heartfelt thanks and gratitude to this distinguished patron of the Divine Life Society.

The work belongs to the Holy Master Swami Chidananda, my revered preceptor. May he be gracious to accept it in his loving hands. This is my prayer and humble submission.

17th July, 1981 Sarat Chandra Behera

Author with His Holiness

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CRADLE OF CULTURE

Swami Chidananda was born in Mangalore in the then Presidency of Madras, in an orthodox Maharashtrian Vaishnavite Brahmin family of Jahgirdars who had migrated to Kumbhakonam and had been awarded Jahgirs in the days of Shivaji. The family had continued to enjoy royal patronage during British rule, too. One of them, Govind Rao Bijapurkar, received from Queen Victoria the Jahgir of Myleripalayam in Coimbatore district for his services to the Crown. His grandson, Sarkheel Govind Rao was appointed Liaison Officer at the palace at Tanjavur, and was placed in charge of the properties of the Maratha princes who had been pensioned off after the dissolution of the Maratha empire, by the British administration. This line of prosperous aristocrats which descended from the Jnani Bijapurkar family, attained celebrity for its nobility and piety. The nephew of Govind Rao Bijapurkar, Jnani Narayan Rao was regarded as a God-realised soul.

Sarkheel Govind Rao was a philosopher prince. He possessed an uncommon intuition; often he surprised people by accurate predictions. He was a self-satisfied man with few wants, deeply spiritual and contented with what God has bestowed upon him. He was a Sthitaprajna, a man of steadfast wisdom, unmoved by prosperity or adversity, leading a private retired life of inward contemplation. He evinced deep sympathy for the poor and the lowly. He would not take his daily food without feeding a few hungry men first. His wife Kaveri Bai, too, was a spiritually advanced soul. She lived almost like a Tapasvini. When Govind Rao passed away she did not mourn or make any formal outward show of bereavement. The only change that one could notice about her thereafter was that she started wearing a white

saree and led an austere, withdrawn life. She lived on fruits and milk alone for the rest of her life. She was held in high regard by her neighbours for her piety and purity. She used to invite devotees and conduct Satsangas at her home every now and then.

Kaveri Bai's father, Venkat Rao, worked as an "Attache" in the Mysore palace. But he was an "Attache" only by official designation. His non-attachment to mundane things was proverbial; in fact, he was regarded as a saint by many. He was a great devotee of Lord Krishna whose image he had installed in his residence, which is even now known as Katte Manay, situated opposite the palace in Mysore. He used to pour forth devotional hymns in praise of the Lord with the spontaneity and ease of a born poet. He has left behind hundreds of compositions which are used by a large number of Madhva Brahmin families even now. Although he occupied a high position in the official hierarchy of the State, his life was an example of the traditional image of water on the lotus leaf. He kept an open house for devotees and saints. The worship-hall in his residence became a veritable public temple and people in large numbers used to visit its hallowed sanctum for the Darshan of the deity[1]. Attache Venkat Rao was considered to be a God-realised soul. Sometimes he used to come to Madras and stay with his daughter Kaveri Bai. The meeting of the father and daughter used to produce an atmosphere of spiritual Satsanga.

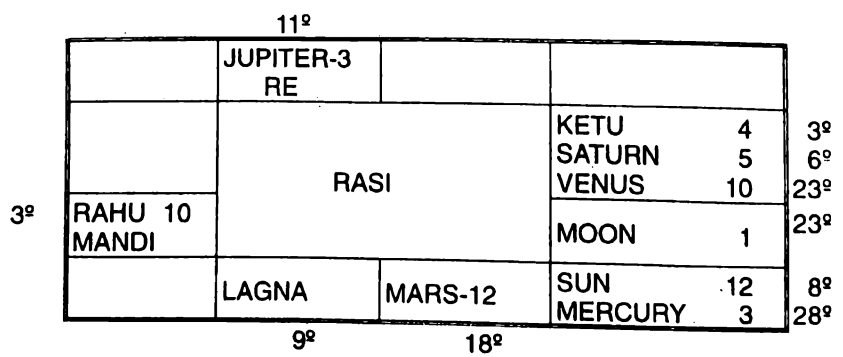
Sarkheel Govind Rao and the blessed Kaveri Bai had two sons—G. Krishna Rao and G. Srinivasa Rao—and a daughter, Gopi Bai. G. Krishna Rao and G. Srinivasa Rao flourished as prosperous Zamindars, inheriting several villages in the Coimbatore district, extensive lands at Rajagopalapuram near Tanjore in the Mannargudi district of Tamil Nadu and sprawling houses in the city of Madras. They used to stay at Coimbatore with their

1 *Even now people go there to offer worship on Janmashtami days.*

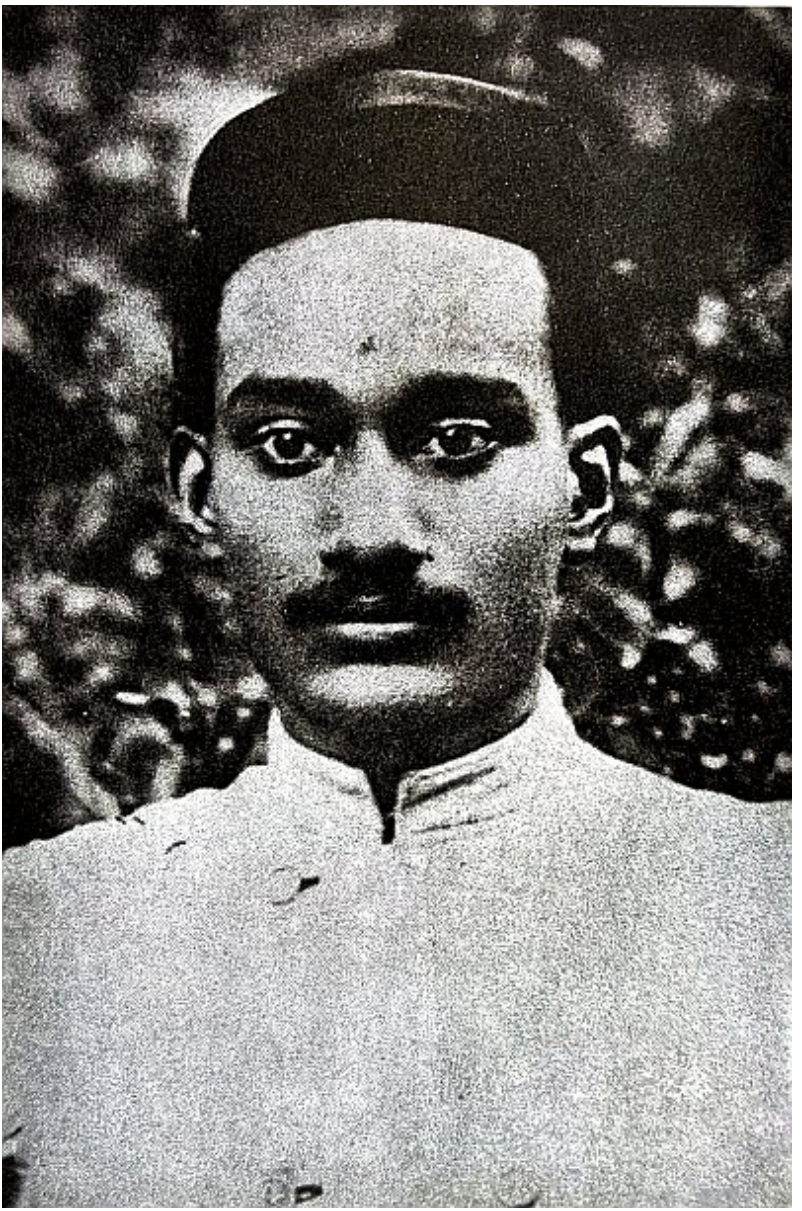
father who was then living a retired life. After the death of their father the two brothers left Coimbatore and settled in the Madras city.

G. Srinivasa Rao and his elder brother, lived in a rambling old mansion named "Kimberley", located then in the outskirts of the Madras city towards the west. In 1910 Srinivasa Rao got married to Sarojini Devi, daughter of Nellikai Venkat Rao and Sundaramma, a highly respected couple of Mangalore. This marriage brought about the union of two very prosperous and ancient families. Such was the popularity of N. Venkat Rao that he was elected Chairman of the Municipal Council of Mangalore for three consecutive terms. He had inherited vast coffee estates from his father Gundu Rao, who was a merchant prince. He lived in a palatial building named "Manohar Vilas", and exerted great influence over the socio-cultural life of Mangalore. His wife, Srimati Sundaramma Devi, was a very pious and cultured lady. She wrote a book of prayers—Devara Nama—comprising devotional songs in Kannada. She was held in so great an esteem by the people that when she passed away in 1940 almost the whole of Mangalore turned up to mourn and attend her funeral rites. She had no male issue, but only four daughters, namely Sarojini, Manorama, Malati and Mukta. Sarojini Devi was the eldest of them all. She was given in marriage at the age of twelve to G. Srinivasa Rao of Madras. She inherited a deep strain of religious devotion from her mother. She was a curious blend of Oriental tradition and Occidental living. "Manohar Vilas" in those days used to wear a typical western look, frequented by the Portugese, the Dutch and other European nationals of high social status. She had been brought up in a predominantly Western atmosphere. She was educated in a convent. Among her accomplishments were counted the fact of her being a good piano player, one who could, besides, sing nice English hymns. She was also excellent at Tennis.

Sarojini Devi's first child was a daughter whom the parents named Hemalata. Two years after the birth of Hemalata, at 10.35 A.M. on a Sunday, the twelfth day of the dark half of Bhadrapada, on the 24th of September, 1916, Sarojini Devi gave birth to a Siddha in "Manohar Vilas"—the future Swami Chidananda. The Vaishnavite parents named the baby Sridhara. Gopi Bai, the child's loving aunt, used to call him Siddha, a sweet contraction of the name Sridhara. The astrologer who prepared the horoscope recorded that the child would attain Siddhi in this very birth. A famous Yogi astrologer only confirmed it later when he declared in 1949, "Chidanandaji was a great Yogi and saint in his previous birth itself; this is his last birth." The child was born in the Vrischika Lagna with Rahu in the third, Jupiter in the sixth, Venus, Saturn and Ketu in the ninth, Moon in the tenth, Mercury and Sun in the eleventh and Mars in the twelfth house in the horoscope. Ketu in the ninth house holds possibilities of final liberation. Saturn and Venus in the ninth house indicate a strong predilection for Raja Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Sarojini Devi got the horoscope of the baby prepared with the help of another expert astrologer and preserved it in her own handwriting in Devanagari script. The birth chart of Sridhara's horoscope is as follows:—



Mother Sarojini Devi



Father Srinivasa Rao

In the lap of the Mother

AT MANOHAR VILAS

L. to R. Standing—Aunt Malati, Sridhara (Swamiji), Maternal Grandfather N. Venkat rao, Elder Sister Hemalata, and Aunt Mukta inher front

L. to R. Sitting—Younger Brother Raghavendra, Maternal Grandmother Sundaramma Devi, Sister Vatsala, Aunt Manorama, and Sister Vasudha in the front.

The balance of Ketu Maha Dasa left at his birth was a period of five years, seven months and eight days. The nativity star of Sridhara was Magha in the first quarter and his Janma Rasi was Simha. The horoscope suggested that he would achieve a grand, extraordinary personality in the days to come.

Two years after the birth of Sridhara, at a time when Sarojini Devi was again in the family way, Srinivasa Rao suddenly developed an intense sense of dispassion, and one day quietly disappeared from home. He fled to the holy Samadhi shrine of Sri Raghavendra Swami at Mantralaya near Raichur, where he remained untraced for a long time. Raghavendra Swami had left the mortal frame before five hundred years. But even in the disembodied state he continues to bless and guide his devotees. One day Sridhara's uncle Krishna Rao heard a voice from within: "I am Raghavendra Swami of Mantralaya speaking to you. Srinivasa Rao is with me. Do not worry. He shall return to you soon." To the surprise of everybody Srinivasa Rao did, indeed, come back to "Kimberly" soon after Krishna Rao had this wondrous experience. A few days later Sarojini Devi gave birth to a male child. In memory of the grace of the great Raghavendra Swami, the baby was named Raghavendra. Subsequently Sarojini Devi gave birth to two more daughters, named Vasudha and Vatsala. All these children used to spend long periods at "Manohar Vilas", the residence of their maternal grandfather at Mangalore.

Sarojini Devi was an ideal housewife. Her life of immaculate purity and devotion registered a deep impress on the heart of Sridhara. Like queen Madalasa of ancient times she was the one to give his first lessons to her illustrious child. She used to sing Bhajans of Mira Bai, Rai Das, Kabir Das and Narsi Mehta and delight the young child with stories of saints from the Himalayas. At bed time every day Sridhara would curl up beside his mother demanding a song or a story. The affectionate

mother hardly ever disappointed him. She would hum devotional songs in her melodious voice and narrate stories of seers and sages. Sridhara was possessed, as it were, by those Bhajans and stories. Later, while delivering a talk he would gratefully recall the profound influence thus exerted by his mother in moulding his personality[2]. Sister Vandana has recorded in her "Gurus, Ashrams and Christians", by describing how while on a visit to "Christa Prema Seva Ashram" in Pune, Swamiji recalled to his mind a Bhajan of Meera Bai, which his mother once sang to lull him to sleep. The Bhajan narrated the absorption of Meera into Divinity in course of her ecstatic dance when she vanished and her Saree was found dangling from the image of the Deity. Swamiji described how he was profoundly impressed by this story of divine merging. Such were the lessons that Mother Sarojini imparted to her beloved son, and the lessons were never forgotten. It is well said, indeed, that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

During his childhood Sridhara's younger brother, Raghavendra, was his playmate and Anantaya, his grandfather's old retainer, was his constant companion. Anantaya had been with the family of Nellikai Venkat Rao for a long time. He was treated almost as a member of the family. He used to keep watch over Sridhara and Raghavendra and the other children at their play-time. The children would often play along the banks of the ebullient Netravati, blissfully flowing its final lap to union with the Arabian Sea. The sunset in the horizon of the Arabian Sea was the signal for the conclusion of the day's play. But the children would still linger. Tired, they would dig their hands and feet into the sand and pester Anantaya for stories. The old retainer had collected almost an inexhaustible fund of stories from the Jaimini Bharata, the Ramayana and the Bhagavata Mahapurana, and was always willing to regale them with

2 *For instance the speech delivered on October 2, 1977 at Women's Inter College at Uttarkashi.*

one. On such occasions, Sridhara would sit mute and enthralled, drinking deep from the stream of devotion pouring forth from the lips of the old man. Twilight would be deepening by the time the story would end. The old man would then pause and question the children, "Whom will you be like ?" Sridhara, his face lit up with a bright and solemn look, would invariably answer, "I shall be a Rishi." At this the old man would laugh aloud and making a face at Sridhara say, "You would be a Nushi", which means mosquito in Kannada. How could the loving old man guess that Sridhara was, indeed, a Siddha, born to illumine the path of countless seekers? As far as Sridhara was concerned, he meant what he said. Sometimes he used to confide to his aunt Malati Bai that he would like to get into the forest and lonely caves and meditate in the seclusion like the sages of yore. The thought of becoming a Rishi was so intense in him that one day he actually put on a loin cloth, besmeared talcum powder all over his body like sacred ash, sat down cross-legged on a tigerskin, closed his eyes in a prayerful mood, and seriously awaited the Lord's arrival.

Thus the years of childhood rolled on. Once paternal grandmother Kaveri Bai started with a vast retinue for pilgrimage to sacred places of north India. On her return from the pilgrimage she narrated her sanctifying experience of Tirtha Yatra with a great deal of excitement before her children and grandchildren. To Sridhara the narrative of the grandmother was a thrilling account of a pilgrim soul. This was the earliest occasion in the life of Sridhara, so mentioned Swamiji in a private interview, when the glory of Ganga and Haridwar was dinned into his ears.

Sometimes Sridhara and Raghavendra used to stay with their father in the "Kimberly" bungalow at Madras when their great grandfather "Attache" Venkat Rao used to come to spend a few days with his daughter Kaveri Bai. Once during such visits Kaveri Bai asked young Sridhara to bow before him and solemnly whispered into his ears

that her father was not an ordinary mortal, but a great Bhakta who had been blessed with the vision of Lord Krishna[3]. Sridhara was thrilled to hear these words and felt excited with the sanctifying Darshan of a man of God in his own great grandfather. He resolved within himself that one day he would be as great a Bhakta as his great grandfather, and see God.

The holy occasion of Sridhara's sacred thread ceremony came in due time. The members of the family decided to perform the auspicious Upanayana ceremony at Tirupati, the sacred seat of Lord Venkateswara, their tutelary deity. At the end of the ceremony when all were returning Sridhara felt drawn by a beautiful idol of Sri Rama in one of the shops and beseeched his parents to buy the image for him. The parents were happy to hear the request and bought for him the wooden idol of Sri Kodanda Rama.

Thereafter Sri Kodanda Rama was to occupy a central place in the children's life at "Manohar Vilas". The idol was installed by the side of the family deity and offered ceremonial worship on all important occasions. Sridhara was now found to be very meticulous in observing spiritual discipline and rituals of worship. He never took food without performing the daily Sandhya Vandana which is enjoined upon Brahmins from the time of their sacred thread ceremony. Daily he used to sit down at the feet of Sri Kodanda Rama, in the company of his aunts, brother and sisters and offer his prayerful worship. This used to be an enchanting moment for them all. A miraculous thing came to be observed at the time of Sridhara's worship. When he used to offer flowers to the Lord, apply fragrant sandal and vermilion to His

3 *Even at the time of his death "Attache" Venkat Rao kept repeating the Names of the Lord. He did not die of any disease. He left his mortal coil with the remembrance of God. It is said in the Bhagavad-Gita (VIII-5): "And whosoever, leaving the body goes forth remembering Me alone, at the time of death, he attains My Being: there is no doubt about this."*

SRI GOPALA KRISHNA
Installed by Attache Venkat Rao

Attache Venkat Rao

forehead and light the lamp before Him, the idol seemed to shine with an extraordinary effulgent halo and a celestial smile used to wreathe the divine countenance. The young devotees could see this almost everyday and they were thrilled with joy at this manifestation of divine grace. There were days when the radiance around the image did not flash, and then their sorrow would know no bounds. They would wait a long time casting furtive glances at the image to catch a glimpse of that heavenly glow. Then Sridhara would come forward and tell the others that they must have committed some unworthy act or neglected some important matter so as to displease the Lord and ask them to join him in offering prostrations and prayers to the Lord with deep fervour and love. So saying he would supplicate before the Lord with folded hands and pray to Him to be gracious and to excuse them for their faults and appear once again in His lustrous form. And lo! there it would flash out again, the same old radiance and grace.[4]

Sridhara made a chariot for Lord Kodanda Rama out of an old clock stand. He used to take the idol of Rama round the mango grove on that chariot. In course of such car festivals the young devotee used to be full of divine ecstasy; some times he would sit in a meditative pose and firmly announce, "I will be a Yogi." There was an old servant in the house named Balu who was already convinced that Sridhara possessed Yogic powers. He used to wait eagerly for the holy charanamrita from Sridhara's hands. It was his conviction that the holy water distributed by Sridhara had cured him of a chronic stomach trouble. Thus almost each member of the family

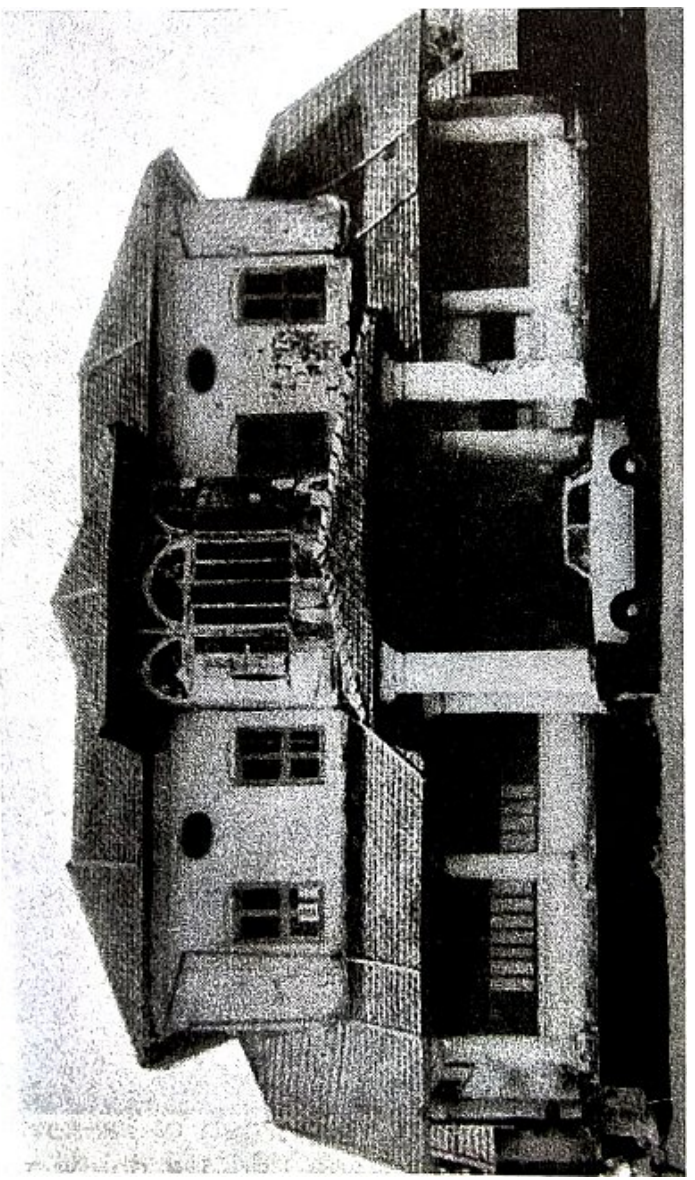
4 *The image is still being worshipped at the residence of Srimati Malati Bai Govind Rao at Jahgir House, 213, Raja Street, Coimbatore. Malati Bai Mataji who narrated the above incident to the author is herself convinced that the Archavatara Sri Kodanda Rama worshipped by Swami Chidananda in his childhood has an undoubted potency and mitigates the misfortunes of her family whenever they seek His protection.*

had his or her own share of experience suggesting the extraordinary holiness of the young Sridhara.

Sridhara already had the making of the future Siddha in the core of his being, but in his day to day life he behaved like a normal healthy child. He was fond of playing innocent practical jokes. He delighted in climbing hills and minars. He was a dauntless swimmer, too. Once he saved his aunt Malati Bai from being drowned. He loved all animals and treated them with kindness. Even at the age of ten he used to display a remarkable sense of humility. Once his maternal grand parents had taken out their entire family for a vacation at Bangalore. One evening when the elder member of the family had gone out for a stroll, Sridhara discussed with the other children how knowingly or unknowingly they committed mistakes everyday and convinced them that they should offer their apologies to the elders. Thus inspired by him all of them took bath ar d prostrated before the elders in wet clothes on their return. The seniors did not exactly relish the demonstration and mildly admonished them; but the incident goes to reveal the peculiar piety Sridhara was already reflecting in his thoughts and acts.

As a child Sridhara was in love with life. He was full of fun and innocent mischief. He was fond of displaying his capacity for mimicry. Indeed, he was a good actor. During his stay at Mangalore a Christian lawyer who used to stage amateur dramatic performances always insisted young Sridhara to take part in his plays. Like an average child of his age he thus loved life, nature and the arts. But at the same time there was a certain solemnity that went with the boisterousness, an extraordinary sensitiveness to right and wrong and a deep religious fervour which set him apart from the common run of children. Grandmother Sundaramma took all possible care to nurture her grandchildren spiritually. She used to take them to the famous temple of Goddess Mangala Devi. In "Manohar Vilas" there was a big hall where she

SRI KODANDA RAMA
Installed by Swamiji in his childhood



Manohar Vilas

used to arrange Harikatha and religious discourses. She used to invite famed Pundits for week-long recitations of Srimad Bhagavatam. Sridhara was particularly noted for his keen interest in all these activities. One day he heard two significant and well-known stories from the Pundit in course of such Harikatha sessions. One of these relates to the behaviour of a frog while it was already sinking into the jaws of death. As it was being swallowed by a snake, a dragon fly flew over it, and even in that critical state the frog shot out its tongue to catch the dragon fly. This illustrates the nature of the bound Jivas in Samsara. The other story relates how, moving in the forest one moonlit night, a certain man fell into a well. Half way down the well he managed to catch hold of a plant which had grown in a crevice on the wall. A snake had coiled itself round this plant and began slowly advancing towards him. In great consternation when he looked up, he saw the head of a tiger looking down at him from the ground above. Below him he saw a crocodile waiting for him with open jaws. At such moment some honey dripped from a honey comb in a tree above. And the hanging man opened his mouth and put out his tongue to catch a few drops of the honey. This again is another version of the horror of Samsara and the enthralled state of Jivas. These two instructive stories had a lasting impression on Sridhara's mind.

Experiences, acts and thoughts of these various kinds filled the days of Sridhara at "Manohar Vilas". That was, indeed, the cradle of culture where the inner personality in him was nourished and prepared for its growth along fated lines in the years ahead. Noble thoughts enveloped his consciousness all the time. The saint in Sridhara treasured all those vibrant ministrations offered by the house in the deepest core of his being. The die was thus cast from the very beginning. His grand future, though largely hidden at the moment from public view was already having its early unfoldment in the mysterious regions of his heart. The seed had been

sown. It was only a matter of time for it to sprout forth, grow tall and sturdy and spread out its expanding boughs in all directions, offering fruits and shade to countless, weary, questing souls on the highway of life.

CHAPTER TWO

IN QUEST OF GOD

Sridhara was admitted into the St. Anne's Convent at the age of seven. Mother Sarojini Devi, who had herself been educated in that same convent, took charge of his education. She was particularly careful that he should have a strong base in English. It is interesting to note that this future Swami was from the beginning to the end of his educational career brought up in a predominantly westernised educational environment, informed by Christian discipline. The English education not only made him modern in his temperament but also endowed him with a certain catholic outlook.

After a year's stay in St. Anne's he was admitted into the Rosario Secondary School, where he studied upto the Third Form. Right from this elementary stage of his student career his classmates were struck by a certain spiritual quality about him. One of his classmates at the Rosario School was Devidas Girdharlal Chandarana, now a well-known business magnate of Mangalore. This is what he recalls about Sridhara—"My recollection of the great soul is that he was far above the average in his studies, brilliant and intelligent. His face was always radiant and lustrous and at the same time we could see that he was always interested in books on religion and philosophy even in those early days. He would never waste any time and he was a voracious reader. No doubt he had interest in games like Badminton and he used to love walking and enjoyed nature and its scenic beauties. While he was cheerful all the time, yet it appeared to one that his mind was working at something else always. He had very few friends and even now he recollects them and makes it a point to remember and visit them. It so happened that his residence and my residence were on the same road and were very close. Daily we used to walk

together up and down, to and from the school. This gave me the benefit of a close touch with him. Off and on I just used to observe that he would one day become a Swami. I do not know what prompted me to do that. But it was spontaneous probably looking at the simple life he led in spite of the aristocratic family to which he belonged. His needs were minimum and he loved simple life. All these factors must have influenced me just to remark that he would one day become a great Swami. At no time would he use harsh words to any one, whatever injustice one might have done him. He always used to exhort his friends to pursue the right path and not to drift, whenever there was any discussion on the matter".

Although Sridhara was brought up and educated in the Western style he remained a child of the Orient. The education that he received did not render him Westernised because the domestic atmosphere he breathed was drenched in ancient values of the Hindu world. He was thus destined to serve as an isthmus between the ancient East and the modern West. The stories of saints and sages he had heard as a child had sunk deep in his inner mind and moulded his aspirations. Worship of the Supreme Being in the form of an idol had found a place of abiding interest not only in his daily routine, but in the very core of his being. Lord Rama was already enshrined in the throne of his heart. The sacred idol of Kodanda Rama, which he brought as a memento of his Upanayana ceremony from Tirupati, had come to occupy the central point in his life in the blessed abode of "Manohar Vilas".

One day during this period there occurred a special event which was to have a powerful impact on the spiritual life of Sridhara. He happened to come in contact with a Godman, one whose very life-breath was Rama Nama and who exerted an overwhelming influence on the people of India. When Mahatma Gandhi was addressing a prayer meeting at Mangalore, Sridhara as a child of eight had a close view of him sitting by his side with his

grandfather N. Venkat Rao, who presided over the function. Even as a child he felt entranced by the spiritual magnetism of this apostle of truth and non-violence. This was to remain an unforgettable moment all his life. Bapuji was, indeed, the first spiritual personality outside home who exerted a profound spiritual impact on Sridhara, an inspiration that was to be dearly cherished by the future Swami all through his life. Twenty-four years later Sridhara was to meet him again; this time he went as the personal representative of Swami Sivananda to the Dalit colony in Delhi and was then greeted by the Mahatma as "blessed one". His first encounter with Gandhiji is remembered by him even today as a very significant event of his life. He had seen the Lord in the idol of Kodanda Rama. Now he witnessed a Godman whose very being pulsated with the Name of Rama.

The next major experience of his life was the passing away of his beloved mother. Her death occurred in unusual circumstances. One day during her stay at "Kimberly" in Madras she drove to the beach with other members of her family. While taking a stroll there she tumbled against a piece of stone. There was some pain and a little swelling in her left leg. It grew so serious in a few hours, however, that the physician had to prescribe amputation of the leg. But death did not permit time even for that, and on 3rd June, 1926, at the age of twenty-eight, Sarojini Devi's earthly sojourn came to an end. Death of the beloved mother was a deeply traumatic experience for the young Sridhara. On the earth plane nothing was dearer to him than his beloved mother, who was at the same time his Adi Guru, the first teacher. He was only a tender child of ten when death snatched away the dearly loved one from his side. The inexorable and unpredictable quality of death was brought home to him with terrible power. He remembered the pains of Samsara. He remembered Lord Kodanda Rama. He remembered the prayer session with Mahatma Gandhi.

And even while he lamented her loss, the truth dawned upon him that all worldly life is unreal and that saints show the only proper path for mortal man.

The death of Sarojini Devi made Srinivasa Rao completely indifferent to worldly duties and joys. He brought back his children from the environs of "Manohar Vilas" to the isolation of "Kimberly" at the outskirts of Madras. There was thus a temporary break in the convent education of Sridhara. Father Srinivasa Rao admitted his two boys into a vernacular school called C.R.C. School in a locality known as Puraswalkam and entrusted their home education to the care of a retired old man named V. Subbaya who became the daily private tutor to Sridhara, his younger brother S. Raghavendra Rao endearingly called Raghu and their two elder cousins Babu and Chotu, to teach and prepare them for admission into a Madras school, where the medium of instruction was the Tamil language. But their school-going was a short-lived affair. Because, one day Father Srinivasa Rao went to Puraswalkam and visited the school where the boys were studying. He felt so much revolted at the sight of the dirty drain and the surroundings there that he decided to stop his children from attending that school. This was an unusual decisiveness brought forth by a fit of anger. Soon the anger subsided, and he fell back into his usual mood of indifference to worldly duties. No alternative arrangement was made for the children's lessons and for a time Sridhara went without formal education.

Srinivasa Rao was then passing through an uncommon phase—callous to all his personal comforts and mundane obligations. He used to remain absorbed in his daily worship for hours on end. By heredity and by nature he was a deeply religious person. Years ago, we recall, he had gone away to Mantralaya, the well-known place of the highly revered sage Sri Raghavendra Swami's Samadhi, like the Samadhi Sthan of the saint Sri Sai Baba at Shirdi, for peace, seclusion and religious

worship. Now he became all the more indrawn, engaged always in muttering the Lord's Names. He cared little for dress and appearance and grew a beard. He was immersed in the worship of his family deity, Venkateswara, and his own Ishta Deva, Sri Rama. He began to have long sessions of Bhajan, to the accompaniment of a violin, and slept late at night. He became so sensitive about external purity that he would not allow others even to touch his clothes. Occasionally he would only ask Sridhara to enter into the Puja room and do the ceremonial worship on his behalf. He knew that Sridhara was not born to be attached to hearth and home. He was the only one who did not express any surprise or dissatisfaction when, years later, Sridhara renounced a very affluent worldly career. Such was the understanding between the father and the son. The devoted son seemed to have inherited Rama Nama from his father by way of Sukshma Samskara.

The break in Sridhara's education was, however, a short one. Grandfather Nellikai Venkat Rao and grandmother Sundaramma Devi felt greatly concerned about the indifference of Srinivasa Rao to the children's education and prevailed over him to send them back to Mangalore. Thus Sridhara resumed his interrupted earlier education at the Rosario Secondary School where he was now admitted into class five. Here he read upto the Third Form under the affectionate care of experienced teachers, most of whom were Christians. At this time Sridhara began to feel a tremendous urge to seek solace of the heart through the quest of God. Then he joined the High School Section of St. Aloysius College where he studied in the Fourth Form with Sanskrit as his optional subject.

At about this time a friend of Nellikai Venkat Rao, one Bolar Vithal Rao, who had established the Saraswati Printing Press, had just then released a book, "In Quest of God", the first work of Swami Ramdas. The book fell into the hands of Sridhara like a gift from God. Vithal Rao

had sent a complementary copy to Nellikai Venkat Rao which automatically reached the hands of Sridhara. It had a nice green cover and Sridhara loved its look in his clean cupboard. He read it so often that almost the entire book was inscribed in his mind like a photostat copy. He was only a young boy of ten when he read the book. When he came across words of spiritual import like ecstasy, mystic vision etc., he would consult the dictionary and reflect on their import. For some of these terms he grew a special fondness and sought to delve into their deepest significance. One of the first attractions the book held for him was its account of places of pilgrimage which Ramdas had toured in search of God. It was as a travelogue that the book fascinated him to start with. Gradually, however, deeper chords of his heart were set vibrating, and he responded to the spiritual current in the book with great fervour and joy. The Himalayas, the Ganga and Rishikesh were now not only familiar places, but haunting possibilities in his mind. The spiritual autobiography of Ramdas kept him in rapture for days and months. Wherever he went, it remained a constant companion with him. "Oh Ram! Thou art father, mother, brother, friend, preceptor, knowledge, fame, wealth and all. Sole refuge Thou art. Make Thy slave merge always in Thee, in Thee alone". Such devotional outpourings of saint Ramdas charged his heart with an ecstasy of divine love. His longing for God and Godmen increased day by day.

In 1932 Sridhara had to bid goodbye to Mangalore and his boyhood friends and proceed to Madras to live with his father at "Kimberly" bungalow, in the outskirts of the city, now known as Shenoynagar. He was admitted into the Sir M.C.T. Mutthiah Chettiar High School, where he studied for two years and completed the S.S.L.C. course. Among his classmates in the school were Sri A. Ramdas, Sri V.R. Chakravarti, Sri N. Subramanian, and a few others who were later to achieve eminence in different stations of life. Sridhara, however, was cast in

an entirely different mould. By birth, upbringing, association and temperament he was inexorably being drawn towards the spiritual life. His classmates found him silent and indrawn most of the time; even his occasional mild jokes which kept them in good humour never really dispelled their feeling that he was rather different from them. He was, of course, a brilliant student who mastered the subjects with ease. But he never seemed to be after a career and his whole being was so much overpowered by spiritual vibrations that it seemed to many of his friends that he was never keen on what went on in the class room. But in spite of his indifference to academic distinction, his mind being naturally one-pointed, he could memorise the subjects in so very short a span of time that he was always considered as one of the distinguished students of the Mutthiah Chettiar High School. But he was learning many other things than mere texts from his teachers. He absorbed from the dedicated life and dignified conduct of some of his teachers abiding lessons in character. A few of them were orthodox Brahmins and followers of the Vaishnava sect of Sri Ramanuja. The noble and dignified life of Tiruvengalachari, the Headmaster, Sri Sundar Raghavachari, the History teacher, Sri Krishnamachari, the Sanskrit teacher and Sri Govindachari, the English teacher, all of whom Swamiji respectfully remembers even today, left a lasting impression in Sridhara's heart.

While his classmates thought him to be a morose and absent-minded participant, he was, even then, silently in quest of the knowledge that once known leaves nothing unknown. After all, education is only a process which brings forth the perfection that is already in man. Sridhara was quietly struggling to manifest that perfection which he intuitively felt was already there in him. His education was, therefore, not confined to the four walls of the school. It was something at which he kept himself engaged all the time—at home, at school

and wherever else he might be. This is how his classmate Dr. Ramdas remembers Sridhara:

"As a schoolmate he was full of the joy of living like any one of us. He was very much interested in cricket, as I was. We were members of two rival cricket teams and were often pitted against each other. His parents lived in a rambling old mansion called "Kimberly" in Aminjikarai which then was at the South West outskirts of Madras city but now is a bustling locality of metropolitan Madras city. His family was a generous one and permitted us to play cricket matches in their big compound. Maharaj himself used to give us refreshments from the family kitchen.

"However, there was one difference between him and us. He was soft-spoken and gentle. He never indulged in certain aberrations like uttering lies, quarrelling and playing pranks with our teachers as normal students of that age are expected to do! Sporadically he used to discuss metaphysics with us. To us this language was a strange one and some of us mistook him to be cranky."

Years later when Sridhara was a highly revered spiritual personality, honoured and sought after throughout the world, he received this old schoolmate of his with the affection that any genial person shows for one of his good old friends. But Dr. Ramdas felt overwhelmed by the splendour of the spirit his old classmate then radiated; by a flash, he intensely felt that he was in the presence of a God-realised soul.

Naturally endowed with a pure and serene disposition Sridhara was a source of inspiration even for his elders at home. In the words of Swami Venkatesananda, "Sridhara was a scholar at school and Sadhu at home". Not one harsh word or indecent expression ever crossed his lips. When his elder cousins in some unguarded moments used wrong expressions, he used to correct them in a very polite tone. Rightly has it been asserted—morning shows the day. Even in his

teens his generosity towards lowly people was a most distinguished trait in him. There was an old half-mad beggar woman called Muthu Mari, whom Sridhara used to feed every day. He used to purchase medicines from out of the money given to him for his personal expenses and distribute them to the sick and the needy. He was born to serve, nay, to grow into a matchless example of selfless service.

Lepers are generally shunned by people as horrid, despicable creatures. But service of lepers was just a spontaneous and natural passion with Sridhara. He would dress their sores, apply medicines on the affected parts and give them medicines for oral use. His compassion for these suffering creatures was boundless. When his cousin Venkat Rao, who was six years older than him, uncomprehendingly asked him once why at such a youthful age he was so passionately engaged in the service of the lepers, Sridhara had a profoundly simple yet disconcerting answer to offer: "Because lepers are also like you and me".

From a very early age he was an extraordinary combination of service, devotion and meditation. The book of Swami Ramdas—"In Quest of God"—which has been mentioned earlier, made him almost mad for God. "O Ram! Make Ramdas mad of Thee. Let him not talk of anything else but Thee. Thou art so merciful—Thou art so loving. O Love, O Mercy—Make Ramdas completely Thine." These words of the God-realised saint had gone deep into him and Sridhara was already devoting days and nights in quest of God, in quest of the nature of the ultimate Reality.

At this stage he needed a friendly guide with whom he could share his thoughts and emotions. Sri G. Krishna Rao, his uncle, was the very man for it. He was a member of the family of Sri Srinivasa Rao, whose only sister Gopi Bai had been given to him in marriage. He was a householder in his outer life but a saint in the core

of his being. He was a great devotee of Lord Sri Rama. No one knew how many crores of the Divine Name of Rama he had silently scribbled on his notebooks and repeated to himself. He inspired his young nephew Sridhara to take to the spiritual practice of repeating the Divine Name—Japa Yoga—for the attainment of God. By his practice and precepts this man of God who was then fifty-six years old, exerted a powerful influence over this young child of God who already possessed great spiritual Samskaras in a very natural manner. Each swelled the tide of divine inspiration in the other; their life together was, as it were, a providentially-ordained Satsanga. It is with reference to such blessed associations that the Lord says in the Gita, "With their mind and their life wholly absorbed in Me, enlightening each other and ever speaking of Me, they remain satisfied and delighted". The uncle and nephew did not forget their other family obligations and ties; but, at the same time, they worked like brothers in trade, worshipping together and reading out to each other various scriptures and inspiring lives such as those of Saint Ramalinga Swami, Tayumaanavar and others. From early evening till the middle of the night they would keep themselves engaged in spiritual discussions and seek to fathom the deep truths contained in the ancient scriptures.

In the course of these sittings Sridhara resolved that if attainment of Nirvikalpa Samadhi was the goal where one was face to face with the Supreme Reality, it must be a living experience with him and not merely a philosophical concept. He was now in search of a spiritual personality with whom that highest spiritual awareness was a reality, a constantly experienced fact of life. He found his ideal in Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the Godman of Dakshinesvara, Kolkata. He studied The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, that wonderful and thrilling life-story so memorably told by Mahendranath Gupta. It was G. Krishna Rao who introduced the divine personality of Ramakrishna to his beloved nephew. The

long-felt need was now in the process of being answered. Sridhara devoted days and nights to reading and reflecting on this great work. Finally he had absolutely no doubt that the height of spiritual experience was a reality which Paramahamsa Deva not merely experienced himself but also demonstrated it for the world to see.

Study of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna was for Sridhara more like a Savikalpa Samadhi than mere Svadhyaya. He felt completely convinced that Gadadhara Vishnu had incarnated Himself as the Saint of Dakshinesvara to fulfil a promise to His devotees. He read the Gospel over and over again and almost learnt it by heart. His study of Ramakrishna Deva's extraordinary relationship with the Holy Mother Saradamani Devi led him to develop a radically new perspective on womankind in general. He visualised the form of the Divine Mother in every woman. His friends were surprised to find that even in the heyday of adolescence his thought and conduct with respect to woman was so reverential and immaculately chaste. To him a woman was the very manifestation of the Divine Mother, nay, Narayana Himself, the sexless Atman. He was so much impressed by Ramakrishna's worship of Mother Kaali that he wanted at one time to build a temple for the Divine Mother in the premises of their house.

It was G. Krishna Rao who at this stage watered and nurtured the plant of Nivritti that was burgeoning in his young nephew. It was easy for him to convince Sridhara that God alone is real in all the three periods of time and that all else is ephemeral. It only remained to ensure that the flow of such thoughts continued as an uninterrupted stream, by constantly stimulating them and shutting out all possible distractions. Such was Sridhara's deep regard for Krishna Rao that as late as 1950 when he reached Madras in the company of Swami Sivanandaji during the famous All-India Tour, though he had already achieved high spiritual attainments and was already a

Sannyasi at that time, he ran to meet Krishna Rao with flowers and fruits as if to a Saint, and prostrated himself at the feet of his old uncle with deep reverence and gratitude.

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa Deva was now the object of Sridhara's worship at "Kimberly". He bought the pictures of Ramakrishna and Saradamani and offered traditional worship to them, observing all prescribed rituals. Every Sunday he used to visit the Ramakrishna Mission at Mylapore, Madras, and recite sonorous hymns in Sanskrit in praise of Sri Ramakrishna. The fiery speeches of Swami Vivekananda which he read in the Complete Works kept him charged with a powerful current of spirituality. Vivekananda's stirring call to modern India became the daily Gita for him.

Along with Ramakrishna's Yoga of Synthesis, the sweet melody of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu now enraptured Sridhara. This was rather natural, for his parents and forefathers had all been followers of the School of Sri Madhvacharya. The great Vaishnava teacher Madhva had established eight monasteries at Udipi. A collateral line of Sri Madhva's successors established Uttaradhi Math at Hospet. The pontiff of the Uttaradhi Math, His Holiness Sri Swami Satya Dhyana Tirtha, happened to be the preceptor of Srinivasa Rao's family. He was a great Tapasvi, Jnani and Siddha. By the power of his penance and the grace of the Divine Mother, he used to materialise Her sacred vermillion for distribution among devotees. When he visited the house of Raoji, to the great satisfaction of the pontiff Sridhara served him personally and obtained the blessings of the Kula Guru for his spiritual progress. Swami Satya Dhyana Tirtha embossed the seals of Sankha and Chakra on the body of Sridhara.

His Vaishnava heritage led him to the Chaitanya Gaudiya Mission. He used to visit the Gaudiya Math at

Madras once a week and observe their ways of worship. He used to do Sashtanga Deergha Dandavat at the feet of the holy men of the Vaishnava Pantheon. This method of prostration, peculiar to the Gaudiya Mission, won Sridhara's hearty approval. It brought home to him the supreme importance of humility and self-effacement in one's spiritual evolution. The Holy Master Sivananda used to practise similar humility and prescribe this Namaskar Sadhana as a useful method of erasing the ego. Humility is the first virtue of a spiritual aspirant; he should be eager to cultivate this divine virtue at all times. A seemingly ordinary thing as this mode of prostration, therefore, became transformed into a significant spiritual practice with a real aspirant like Sridhara.

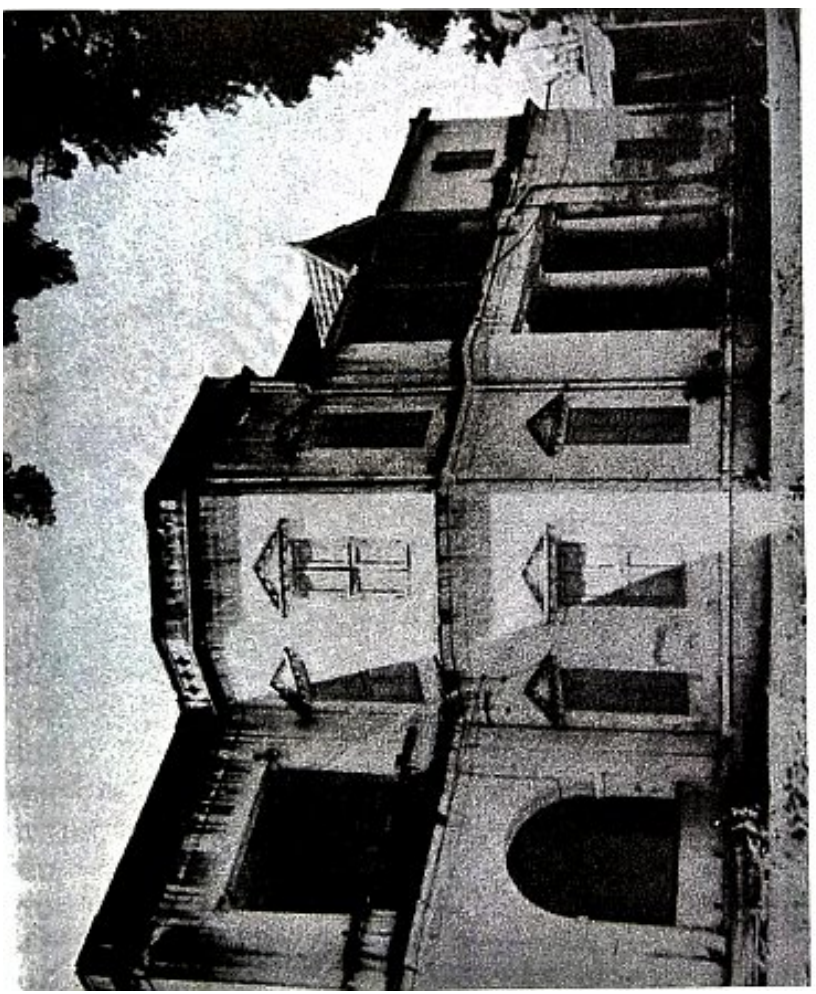
Through things small and big as Sridhara was thus silently growing proficient in the spiritual school, he passed his S.S.L.C. Examination in 1934. He then took admission in the Loyola College with History and Logic in I.A.—and, later, History and Economics in B.A.—as his special subjects. When he moved into college he grew still more indrawn and meditative in nature. He used to keep himself busy for long stretches of time every day in reading books on saints, in reflecting on life in general and in doing spiritual practice. Notwithstanding such a religious orientation, he did his lessons well and passed the Intermediate examination with credit. His introverted, semi-mystical way of life did not render him impervious to his duties and responsibilities; often he used to show a good deal of social enthusiasm and seemed to be very much in love with life. With a mop of nicely cropped hair, his tall figure covered in silken robes and his handsome features suffused with a creamy brightness, he always occupied the centre of attention in all get-togethers.

But in spite of this fashionable look and his pursuit of a modern academic career, his outlook on life remained deeply spiritual. He often appeared contemplative, pitched far away from the classroom

where he sat. As with most others, religious ideas did not merely float about his mind in the company of a hundred other secular thoughts, to be occasionally drawn upon during platform-needs. They were rather deeply cherished food for his soul; he meditated upon them for long hours and treasured them in the very core of his being as values to live by. On occasions, his profound sincerity and uncompromising emphasis on fundamentals naturally came as startling things to his friends. One day, for example, while some pseudo-philosophical discussion was being carried on with a normal youthful fervour among his friends, Sridhara suddenly turned round to V.R. Chakravarthy and asked, "What do you mean by you and I? You mean the body or the soul?" At once the high-pitched tones subsided. The boys who had warmly bandied about half-digested, borrowed philosophical concepts for half an hour or more, now suddenly fell silent and remained uncomfortable, not knowing how to proceed with the quiet question and calm, but serious, bearing of Sridhara.

His student career in Loyola College brought him into intimate contact with Christianity. The Holy Bible moved him deeply. Another Christian document, Imitation of Christ, by Thomas A. Kempis, left an indelible impression on his mind. The supreme sacrifice dramatised on the Cross suggested to him a message to die to the lower self and to live for the eternal one. St. Francis of Assisi, who was noted for his infinite compassion for all God's creatures, specially the birds and innocent animals, left such a powerful impact on Sridhara that he felt one with the very spirit of the holy saint. The prayer of Saint Francis was accepted by him almost as a Guru-Mantra:

"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace!
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is discord, union;



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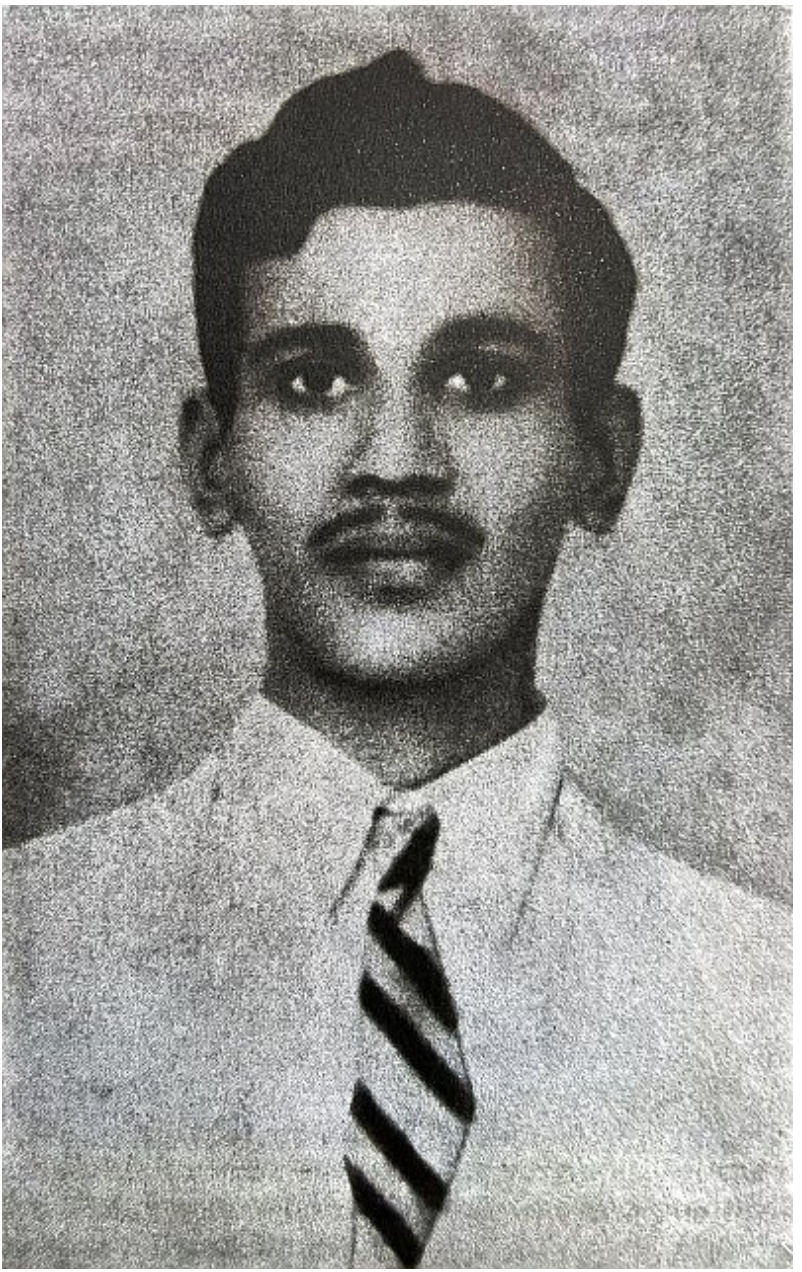


As a student of Loyola College

Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light, and
Where there is sadness, joy.

Oh Divine Master, grant that I may not
so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand; to be loved
as to love; for it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life."

Subsequently he evaluated it as being on par with the wonderful Universal Prayer of his Holy Master Swami Sivananda. He considered himself to be hundred percent Hindu and, at the same time, hundred percent Christian in the spiritual world.

During his study in the Loyola College, Sridhara distinguished himself by a calm, cheerful and playful spirit. His spiritual awareness was not an outcome of some temporary titillation or passing excitement. It was a robust faith that was harmoniously organised into his being without throwing his social personality into any kind of imbalance. While engaged in spiritual culture he did not neglect his physical culture. He was perfectly aware that a sound body is a pre-requisite for a sound mind. It is interesting to note that this precocious spiritual practitioner had both the urge and ability during this period to form a sports association, called the Kimberly Cricket Club. The club was named after the grounds of the family mansion at Madras. The members of the club were very keen and regular players. It is interesting to note that even after his renunciation, while Sridhara was an inmate of the Sivananda Ashram he did not consider it improper to play cricket. He was an expert swimmer, and took great delight in taking long swims in the tank situated within the compound of "Manohar Vilas." He was leading a full life, indeed. While on the one

hand he played cricket in the afternoons with avidity, on the other he devoted his mornings to Yoga Asanas.

With all that comprehensive programme of physical culture and spiritual practice, Sridhara was also assiduous in cultivating certain basic virtues pertaining to religious conduct. Thus he grew into an embodiment of nobility, serenity and generosity. He was always on the look-out for opportunities of serving the poor, the sick, the destitute, the neglected and the downtrodden.[5] This love of service and charity included the mute birds and animals, too. During this period he engaged himself in selfless service as a member of the youth brigade in the Ramakrishna Mission at Mylapore. Love and service of all that moves and breathes was a spontaneous and continuous passion with him. One who beholds the same Atman in all beings has no sense of I and mine, and he, therefore, serves all beings as God in His Virat Svarup. Service of lepers and diseased creatures like stray dogs came to be a part of his daily schedule. Once he served for a long period a patient suffering from small pox, and was himself laid low with the illness. This caused him neither regret nor fear, and he continued his service with unabated zeal. The motive and inspiration being entirely selfless, whatever personal sufferings those entailed could never dampen his enthusiasm. It was now a consecrated life that Sridhara was living, offering his tender, worshipful service to the unfortunate lepers from whom the world turns away with loathing and trepidation. As in the case of his master, Swami

5 *At this time he witnessed two films—"Padosi" and "Achhut Kanya"—which registered a powerful impact on him. The unforgettable closing scene in "Padosi" where a group of villagers bring out the bodies of two drowned persons, one Muslim and the other Hindu, greatly moved his heart. The other play "Achhut Kanya" depicted the character of a lady who gave up her life to save two of her childhood friends, one an untouchable Harijan and other an orthodox Brahmin. These two movies went a long way in persuading young Sridhara to regard the Muslims as his spiritual brothers and look upon the Harijans as his own kith and kin.*

Sivananda, it was such protracted selfless service that rendered him into a practical Vedantin long before he had anything to do with the life of a monk.

A time came when even this great passion for charity and service seemed peripheral when compared with the burning desire for liberation. The thundering call of the great seers exhorting men to tread the path of renunciation for the realisation of the Absolute, to achieve a state where there is cessation of all sorrow and achievement of a supreme bliss, reverberated in his soul and overcame other sentiments. He knew that detachment is fostered by attachment to the great ones. Therefore, he had been assiduously cultivating the company of the wise ever since he was in his teens. Great grandfather "Attache" Venkat Rao (his father Srinivasa Rao's maternal grandfather) and uncle G. Krishna Rao who themselves were great devotees with their rich God-experience had blessed him at home. Even a casual Darsan of the great Siddha Swami Nityananda of Vajreswari in his childhood had left great spiritual impress on his Sattvic mind. From 1932 to 1940—nine significant years in quest of God—Sridhara's spiritual aspirations were constantly on the rise. He kept contact with Siddhas, Yogis, Jnanis and Bhaktas of great eminence right from the age of sixteen when he was only a young student in the Mutthiah Chettiar High School at Madras. During these years he came in contact with nine great masters. The visit of Sri Swami Virajananda of Syamalatal in Almorah to Madras was to have a memorable impact on Sridhara. This great sage from the Himalayas appeared before Sridhara as a veritable embodiment of all the spiritual qualities of the Rishis of Uttarakhand he had heard about from his mother during early boyhood. This encounter produced in him an intense longing to go to the Himalayas.

Sometime later in 1932/1933 he read in the newspapers about the visit of Sri Purohit Swamiji to Madras. Sri Purohit Swamiji was a mystic Yogi, though

not a mendicant in saffron garb. He was a wandering ascetic and a worshipper of Lord Dattatreya. He had great achievements to his credit in Nada Yoga and he left a deep influence over many eminent personalities in the East and the West. Sridhara had already known about this eminent spiritual personality from certain writings on him. Learning from the papers that Purohit Swamiji was to deliver a talk at the Madras University he proceeded there at the appointed hour with deep anticipation and sat through the lecture with rapt attention. He felt so inspired by the discourse that he searched out the place where the saint was staying and went to him with an offering of fruits and flowers. Purohit Swamiji obviously noticed the exalted inner consciousness of Sridhara and spent some time with him teaching the basic spiritual principles and explaining the experience it leads to. Sridhara was deeply impressed by Purohit Swamiji's exposition of the inner sounds (Anahata Nada) produced within the mind of the Sadhak like those of Veena, flute, anklet (Kinkini) and bell at different stages of Sadhana. He had already decided to tread the path of Nivritti. The blessings of Purohit Swamiji strengthened the resolve. Subsequently he met at Madras another great saint, Swami Gayatryananda, and received his blessings and encouragement to proceed in quest of divine experience.

In 1936 he met Sri Ramana Maharshi in his holy Ashram at Arunachalam (Tiruvannamalai). For three days he stayed in the holy presence of Sri Ramana, silently receiving the benign grace of the great sage. Then he proceeded to Malayala Swamiji, a great soul residing in Vyasashram at Yerpedu near Tirupati. This meeting very profoundly impressed Sridhara who was more or less leading the life of a Sannyasi in white clothes now, being totally indifferent to worldly comforts and mundane considerations.

Next he came in contact with Sri Swami Rajesvarananda, a well known saint of Madras, the

founder of the Satchidananda Sangham. He was the spiritual mentor of Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan, an eminent philosopher of our country. The saint could visualise the glorious future of Sridhara and inspired him for his spiritual evolution. Sridhara's frequent visits to Ramakrishna Math had also brought him close to Sri Swami Aseshananda of the Ramakrishna Mission. This distinguished monk of the Ramakrishna Mission felt intuitively that one day Sridhara would blaze forth as a shining jewel in the world of renunciates. Accordingly he took a special interest in Sridhara's spiritual development.

Another saint of eminence whom Sridhara met during those days was Sri Swami Anandashram, one close to Sri Swami Ramdas. Finally, in 1940, he met the great Ramdas himself, founder of the Anandashram of Kanhangad, lovingly addressed by his devotees as Papa. It was the autobiography of the same Swami Ramdas that had first impelled Sridhar to tread the spiritual path. This direct personal contact with its revered author produced an unforgettable impact. Beloved Papa was immensely pleased to note in the young boy a burning desire for liberation. He blessed him for his success and affectionately patted him on his back. Sridhara was filled with divine rapture at the holy touch of this servant of Rama.

Close contact with these holy men of God and their blessings exercised irresistible influence and made him quietly renounce the earthly career for the great mission ahead. Constant service of the sick, the poor and the destitute had kept his mind purified; his Svadhyaya and meditation had rendered him keenly receptive to religious influence. Instruction and inspiration of the great souls, therefore, sank deep into his innermost mind. He was now carried over to a lofty spiritual plane. Even though he was brought up in the midst of plenty and prosperity he displayed extraordinary confidence and calm in taking to a life of great austerities. He gave

up his footwear, rejected the silken robes, and put on a simple dhoti and ordinary shirts and maintained a severe indifference to all that young people crave and delight in. The attitude of Nivritti was now thoroughly active in his personality. He felt that he was being roasted in the fire of Samsara and kept eagerly awaiting the opportune moment to fly to the cool of the Ganga. Now he was a Yogi at home, silently preparing for the supreme sacrifice. Seva, Satsanga and Sadhana—these three engagements now characterised his daily life. Nothing that he then did was without some spiritual bias. Around that time, for instance. he witnessed two films—Tukaram and Sant Jnanesvara. The celluloid lives of these two great saints of Maharashtra entranced him. He was almost under a spell, visiting them again and again, escorting some one or the other member of his family every time. He memorised almost all the Abhangas of Tukaram. He used to go into raptures while singing them in a voice vibrant with deep emotion. He purchased a Tambura and made a practice of singing devotional songs to its accompaniment.

The extent to which he was impressed by the film Sant Jnanesvara may be illustrated by an interesting incident. Many years after his final renunciation when he was already the President of the Divine Life Society, the day following his 49th birthday, on the 25th September, 1965, he happened to be at Haridwar. Suddenly he despatched two cars to the Sivanandashram at Rishikesh with a request to about ten inmates, among them Swami Krishnananda, Swami Madhavananda, Swami Dayananda, Swami Premananda and Sri Narasimhulu, to come to Haridwar to meet a great saint. They all came with eager anticipation to meet the Mahatma. To their surprise and uneasiness, Swamiji led them all into a cinema hall and declared that he would like them to meet there Sant Jnanesvar. It was only then that the senior Swamis of the Ashram realised the somewhat playful nature of the invitation. But Swamiji

was pretty serious about it and narrated to them how greatly he had been inspired by that very film in his early days. He thought this was the best personal offering he could make to them on his birthday.

One remembers a similar experience of Mahatma Gandhi on whom too the impact of two plays—Sravana Kumar and Harischandra—was to be so far reaching and memorable. Thus was a Mohan Das initiated into a process which was finally to culminate in his Mahatmahood. So also was Sridhara surcharged with the fervour of divine love on seeing the two films, and the smouldering desire in him to tread the path of the spiritual stalwarts shot up into a mighty flame of inspiration that would ultimately convert him into a timeless being, a Chidananda. It is possibly because of this personal experience that Swami Chidananda favours the use of the screen media for dissemination of spiritual culture.

Having witnessed the lives of the two great saints on the screen Sridhara now began to devote himself to ardous Sadhana. He used to climb up to the top of the "Kimberly" bungalow and remain there for long hours in deep contemplation. By this time Sri Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh was already writing a series of articles in the nature of practical guidance to spiritual aspirants in a popular periodical "My Magazine of India," edited by Sri P.K. Vinayagam of Madras. Sridhara used to purchase the magazine from the stalls near Loyola college and give himself up to deep meditation and avid practice of the precepts inscribed therein by Swami Sivananda. Soon after, he procured a copy of Swamiji's book, Yoga by Japa, and translated the Great Yogi's instruction into practice by entering into Japa and meditation for hours every day. Later on he was further inspired by two other important books of the Holy Master namely, Spiritual Lessons and Mind, Its Mysteries and Control.

The practical teachings of Swamiji provided a wonderful course in meditation and Sridhara was soon gaining a foothold in the higher realms of Sadhana. The more he entered into the higher realms of spirituality through the gateway of meditation, the more keenly he realised that, for wholetime absorption in Sadhana, Sannyasa was essential. Strange as it may appear, by some providential arrangement the question of his marriage never arose at home even in the prime of his youth. This perfect celibate was not to be bound down with the fetters of Samsara even temporarily.

Sridhara had now developed a distaste for busy surroundings and used to tell his aunt Malati Bai, "If you want to forget God, you must go to Bangalore". The noisy surroundings of the city revolted him; he was pining for the silence and seclusion of some Ashram in order to give himself up alone, entirely, to inner spiritual practices. He was also thirsting for a Guru who would lead him out into the world of pure spirituality. But at home none could sense the drift of his mind. Thus, to the great anxiety and shock of his college mates and relatives he vanished from home one day in 1936. while his Intermediate Examination was knocking at the door. The elderly members of the family had more or less been reconciled to his simple and austere life, his indifference to food and dress, his disregard of material prosperity and habitual aloofness and meditative mood. But no one had anticipated that the young man would have the grit and determination to plunge into the life of complete renunciation so soon. They all felt greatly agitated and launched a vigorous search. Even G. Krishna Rao, his early inspirer, was completely in the dark about his plan of flight. Accompanied by his son Venkat Rao and nephew Govind Rao he made enquiries all around, but there was no trace of the illustrious truant. Sridhara, who had very great reverence for Bhagavan Ramana, had surreptitiously repaired unto the sacred mountain of Arunachalam to seek refuge at the holy feet of the

Uncle Rubgunde Krishna Rao

Looking beyond Samsara

Maharshi. During those days the Maharshi was remaining always indrawn. With his gaze directed towards infinity he used to keep serene and calm speaking only a very few words to the Sevaks of the Ashram on the most essential issues. Sridhara spent three days in his holy presence in silent spiritual communion. The Maharshi as it were indicated by his silence that he was not the destined Guru. In the cosmic plan the relation of Guru and disciple is a preordained one. Sridhara left Ramanashram after three days of silent communion with the Maharshi, exalting, but yet, without the moorings he was in quest of. He did not turn back. From Arunachalam he proceeded to Vyasashram at Yerpedu near Tirupati—the glorious hermitage of Malayala Swami, who was to be known later as Swami Asangananda Giri. But it was a long way off, and he did not have a copper with him. He was, however, determined to reach his destination. He walked along the railway tracks, disregarding all the physical suffering this entailed. After an hour's walk the young aristocrat had to stop at one place and beg food from a farmer who was then drawing water from a well. The farmer offered him a small quantity of rice gruel. Sridhara gulped the gruel and thanked the farmer for his charity and resumed his walk. After long hours, with all his reserves of strength drawn, he staggered on to a railway station, and lay reclining on a bench in the platform. A young station master happened to notice him and sought his identity. Sridhara then looked like a Fakir. When he replied to the station master in chaste, flawless English, the latter was taken aback and began to take an interest in him. The presence of Sridhara had some peculiar impact on him and he engaged the young seeker in some metaphysical discussions. To his great surprise and satisfaction Sridhara could dispel all his doubts. The station master enquired about his wants and arranged for his travel to Tirupati. By providential arrangement, as it were, the passenger who sat next to him in the

compartment happened to be a devotee of Malayala Swami. On hearing Sridhara's mission the gentleman wrote out a letter of introduction addressed to a devotee named Subedar Shanmukham, who was a devotee of the Ashram of Malayala Swami and assured him that he would have no difficulty there. Truly enough Shanmukham led him to Malayala Swami who permitted him to reside there as an inmate of the Ashram. Sridhara was happy to live that life of simplicity and austerity. Like the monks of the Ashram he used to live with one full meal at midday and only some green gram, jaggery and a little ghee in the night. Malayala Swami, who had acquired the personality of a great Tapasvi having done protracted penance at Tirupati, cast a deep influence on Sridhara. He lived there for a few weeks spending all his waking hours in repetition of the Divine Name, study of Bhagavad Gita, prayers and meetings with Malayala Swami.

Meanwhile his relations and friends had, already given up all hopes of tracing him out. Miraculously enough, one of the servants of Srinivasa Rao, Viswanath by name, one day felt that he could locate Sridhara. Impulsively he proceeded to Vyasashram without any definite idea of what he was going to do there, and to his great joy and surprise discovered his young master. He described before Sridhara the misery and anxiety caused at home by Sridhara's absence. He expressed his resolve not to eat or drink unless Sridhara agreed to return home with him. Sridhara had to yield more so because Malayala Swami himself advised him the same way asking him to pursue his formal studies further. It became clear to Sridhara that the appointed time when he should relinquish hearth and home had not yet come. He submitted to the Divine Will without any feeling of disgust or despair. He only prayed to Malayala Swami that he be permitted to stay there for a while longer so as to be able to witness the Sannyasa Diksha of the Swami who was still in white clothes. The prayer was granted. A

few days later His Holiness Sri Swami Sankarananda Giri of Varanasi came to Vyasashram to initiate Malayala Swami into the most sacred order of Sannyasa. He joined Malayala Swami with his vast retinue and proceeded to Kalahasti to pay homage to Lord Siva at that sacred place. After this short pilgrimage the great Guru Sankarananda Giri returned to Vyasashram and initiated Malayala Swami into Sannyasa, by performing the specific sacrifice called "Viraja Homa". Malayala Swami now assumed the new name of Asangananda Giri and at the touch of his master he literally sank into deep meditation at once. As he remained absorbed in the divine for a long period, Sridhara paid silent homage to the great saint and departed from Vyasashram in accordance with his prior instructions.

He came back without any murmur of protest or argument for in his quiet and profound way he had intuitively realised that he must wait patiently for the appointed hour. The members of the family became immensely relieved and greatly jubilant that a serious crisis had been averted. No one seemed to, grasp, however, that this was only in the nature of a preparation and that Sridhara's final act of total renunciation was one day to be an inevitable event. They wished to pacify him in all sorts of ways and pleaded with him to tell them the reason for his absconding. For the first time Sridhara gave public expression to his desire of becoming a Sannyasi in order that he might undertake protracted, unremitting Sadhana. G. Krishna Rao, his uncle and spiritual mentor, advised him to complete his studies in the Loyola College and to decide the future course of action only after taking his degree. Sridhara always honoured the wishes of his uncle. He gave in and his relatives heaved a sigh of relief. They did not realise that with determined persons like Sridhara postponement of an action did not mean abatement of will.

True to his word, Sridhara now plunged into his studies and even though he had very little time left for his

preparation he could master the subjects and pass the Intermediate examination without any difficulty. But he was already a changed man. He lived his days and nights drenched in spiritual thoughts. The contact with Ramana Maharshi and Swami Asangananda Giri (Malayala Swamiji) had incalculable effect on his mental plane as also on his conduct. When he went back to his college with his clean-shaven head like that of a monk and Khadi cap in an indrawn and self-possessed mood, his classmates thought at first that he had family bereavement. It did not take them long to discover the real cause and to realise that they had in their midst an unusual person whose entire being was now oriented towards a mysterious majesty.

Notwithstanding the mighty inner currents of Nivritti he performed his academic tasks with all sincerity. He also utilised this time to broaden his range of studies. Apart from the study of scriptures and books by holy men he devoted a good deal of his time for the study of English literature. With his friend Sri N. Subramaniam he used to discuss Shakespeare and the other English writers, sometimes for hours. He was not an escapist; nor did he admit defeat in his life. He passed his B.A. degree examination creditably in English standing fifth in the whole of Madras Presidency in the year 1938.

After graduation he got ample time for higher spiritual practice. He did not evince any keenness either for some secular career or for material advancement. He had pledged before his uncle to think of Sannyasa only after getting the B.A. degree. There was yet another commitment, too. His maternal grandmother had secured from him a promise that he would not renounce family ties as long as she was alive. At all times in his life Sridhara had always the greatest consideration for others. He was aware of the gravity of the grievous loss of her daughter Sarojini (his mother) for grandmother Sundaramma. He would not cause another rude shock to

her by bidding good-bye to "Manohar Vilas" for ever. So he continued to remain at home for grandmother Sundaramma's sake but kept himself aloof and lived an inner life of his own. He devoted some of his time to educate his younger cousins and junior friends on the divine life and expounded to them the subtle principles involved in piety, honesty, truthfulness and service of fellowmen. One such junior aspirant Sri Venkoba was greatly influenced by Sridhara. The simple and saintly life of Sridhara had such a powerful impact on him that he requested Sridhara to give him initiation. Sridhara did not disappoint him. Even though he was not a Sannyasi he felt neither timid nor self-conscious. He knew he lived in Rama and that was enough. Solemn and confident, this young man of twenty three initiated Sri Venkoba into the great Rama Taraka Mantra. And such was his spiritual attainment that the initiation produced an immediate and profound change in the young nephew.

It is to be remembered that despite all these spiritual preoccupations he did not neglect his duties to the other members of the family as also to his fellowmen. Due to the outbreak of the Second World War the city of Madras had been exposed to some danger. There was a mass evacuation of the population of Madras city by Government recommendation. The entire "Kimberly" household left Madras and settled at Coimbatore, letting out "Kimberly" Bungalow for a temporary period. At this time Sridhara was particularly helpful to his paternal uncle G. Krishna Rao in the day to day household works as also in the estate work to a considerable extent. His father never evinced interest in getting any kind of work done by Sridhara. He knew that Sridhara was not meant for prosaic humdrum family obligations. He had an intuitive conviction that his son was not of them but only a free soul of the open sky and that it would be futile to strive to bind him down to domestic pursuits and duties. He knew that Sridhara would keep himself free as a bird to fly out into the wide world proclaiming the glories of

God. Father Srinivasa Rao, therefore, never made the young seeker feel constrained by any kind of family obligations or social duties. However, Sridhara, of his own accord, served the family in manifold ways. His was not the selfish kind of spirituality which makes people unnaturally and even unfeelingly callous to the needs and expectations of their relatives. During this period, for example, when his brother-in-law Dr. B.N.K. Sharma was down with some serious ailment for a protracted period, Sridhara nursed him back into health with the tender care of a mother. But through all such sympathy and service to his family members he never permitted himself to become involved into a state of attachment. In all that he did he remained utterly detached and without vanity, and therefore, absolutely uncontaminated. Thus he went on with unflagging Sadhana and felt that he was mature enough to render physical service to his family without enmeshing his chitta. Inwardly he was biding his time for a suitable opportunity to break free of everything and finally take to the life of renunciation.

It was in the year 1940 that he met Swami Ramdas (Papa) of Kanhangad, at Madras. His beloved grandmother Sundaramma passed away that very year. He had acquired his Degree through the recognised course of secular education and thereby had kept his word to his grandmother as well as to uncle G. Krishna Rao. The bond to which he had willingly subjected himself through human considerations had now been cancelled and Sridhara had bound himself to no other commitment. At this time his meeting with Swami Ramdas had the inevitable effect. Ramdas had continued to be a source of great inspiration to him ever since he heard of him in 1928. It was as an interesting anecdote that he first came to know of Ramdas. In his younger days many officials and gentlemen used to come to "Manohar Vilas" for a game of Tennis with Nellikai Venkat Rao. A Municipal Sanitary Inspector of the city used to be a regular visitor. Sometimes he used to talk

about his younger brother who had renounced his material career to live the life of a monk. That younger brother of the Inspector was no other than Swami Ramdas, Sridhara's beloved `Papa'. So the meeting brought forth a fervent tide of divine passion. The saint, too, was immensely pleased to note the burning aspiration in the young man. Ramdas blessed him by invoking the grace of Rama. Sridhara was now reminded of the words of the saint in his autobiography:—"O Ramdas, rise to the very height of renunciation and there sit on its crest and view the transient nature of the whole show around you. Everywhere you see birth, growth and death. All, all are running along the same road to destruction". Ramdas poured the shower of his blessings on the already fertile field of Sridhara's mind. And that was enough to make the seed burgeon forth.

Soon after this meeting with Ramdas, God sent young Sridhar a tempting offer, as if to test his spirit. He got selected for an appointment in the Royal Air Force as a pilot with very alluring prospects. The family was by now passing through relatively hard days. It would have thus been a welcome decision from all points of view for him to accept the offer. But, however, to Sridhara it did not cause even a momentary flicker of temptation. He had to adduce some reasons, however, for his refusal. And so, while acknowledging the letter of selection for the training and offering his thanks, he politely submitted that he did not take non-vegetarian food, and since that could create awkward situations in the social environment of the job in question, he would prefer to decline the offer.

Having courteously rejected the offer, Sridhara was now determined to take to renunciation. His Vairagya was based on reasoning, and nurtured over a long period of meditation and introspection. In the words of Swami Krishnananda, now "the innermost essence of the spirit of India took possession of him". But even at this moment Sridhara's consideration for others was

exemplary. He called his younger sisters—Vasudha and Vatsala—and his young aunt Malati Bai to him and conveyed to them his desire for renunciation. Vatsala was then only a girl of sixteen. In moving words Sridhara told them that he had an obligation to look after them, particularly Vatsala. But his yearning for God made him miserable in the worldly surroundings. Very earnestly he asked each one of his dependent sisters and aunt to honestly tell him if without any regret or sorrow they would permit him to leave. He knew God would take care of them as no brother or nephew could. But it was for them to decide. He declared that if even one of them so desired, he would continue to stay at home till all of them were finally settled in life. A Siddha was playing with Maya. Maya is extremely powerful. But she is powerless before the servant of Rama. The appeal of Sridhara was so earnest and the young people in themselves were so full of spiritual Samskaras that each one of them gave him free and full leave to relinquish the earthly career. Glory be to the divine families of Bharatavarsha which maintain such noble sentiments and sublime ideals!

Sridhara's path was now clear. He had already been in touch with Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh and had received the advice to boldly go forward to tread the path of Nivritti. Now he saw that the joyous day of unfettered freedom was about to come. Before taking the final plunge he wrote four letters to four saints, namely, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Ramdas, Swami Rajeswarananda and Swami Aseshananda of Ramakrishna Mission, for their blessings. He mentioned that he was a Brahmin by birth and that he wanted to take the momentous step to renounce hearth and home and tread the path of Nivritti and prayed for their blessings. All of them sent their blessings to Sridhara and encouraged him to go ahead. Sridhara also wrote to the Manager of the Samadhi Sthan of Sai Baba of Shirdi whose prasad he received as a token of Baba's blessings.

Now, there was not a moment to waste. "Not by works, not by progeny, not by wealth but by renunciation alone is immortality attained." These words of Mahanarayana Upanishad were ringing in his ears. With indescribable joy in his heart and with a solemn mind Sridhara stepped out of his house in Coimbatore on 6th March, 1943. This was the momentous day when he finally renounced the social and family life into which he was born twenty seven years earlier. For his father and other members of the family the inevitable had happened, and they were resigned to it. After all, Sridhara had always been a Sannyasi in white clothes. Renunciation was only a formal act for him. Swami Venkatesananda rightly observes, "Nothing had to be achieved for his own sake which he had not already achieved. He never was attached to anything to renounce anything. He never was a Grihasti, to embrace Sannyasa. He never was a worldly man to abandon the world. He was all this—a Yogi unattached to anything, a Sannyasi par excellence, a great saint and very much more at his very birth". The born Siddha, therefore, now left home for the good of the world.

From Coimbatore he proceeded to Tirupati to pay homage to Lord Venkatesvara. Here he lived for some time and put himself into a test as well as a discipline to erase the ego. He requested a building contractor to give him some manual work on a daily-wage basis. He worked there as a labourer shedding the psychological residues, if any, of his personality as a Brahmin of a distinguished family, and as one, moreover, with a distinguished academic career. He toiled meekly at the construction site. For some days he worked with all sincerity and then sought permission from his employer to leave. The contractor gave him his wages. But Sridhara took only one rupee as a token of love and gratitude. And then with some flowers he went up to offer the coin at the feet of Lord Venkatesvara as a mark of gratitude for the wonderful opportunity the Lord had provided him for

cultivating humility. Swami Sivananda had also undergone such a discipline before his Sannyasa Diksha, serving as a cook under a postmaster at Dhalaj. In this respect Sivananda and Chidananda were cast in the same mould.

From Tirupati Sridhara journeyed to Shirdi, the seat of the Samadhi shrine of the great Sai Baba. Here Sridhara stayed for a full month, till 20th April, the holy Ram Navami day of 1943. He witnessed the great festival there on the occasion of Ram Navami when innumerable devotees came carrying the holy water from river Godavari from a distance of fourteen miles in order to perform Abhisheka to the holy Samadhi of Sai Baba. Here Sridhara met a police officer, named Sahasrabuddhe, who, through his contact with Sai Baba had been transformed into a spiritual personality, and had come to be popularly known as Das Ganu Maharaj. During his stay in the Samadhi Sthan of Sai Baba he worked hard on his own, cleaning the library hall, and offering other kinds of voluntary service. The management wished that he should be a permanent resident there. But Sridhara was now a parivrajaka in search of his Holy Master. So, after Rama Navami he left Shirdi and proceeded to Brindavan, the seat of the eternal sport of Lord Krishna. Here he offered his homage to the Flute Bearer of Brindavan and stayed in the local Ramakrishna Mission Ashram for fifteen days. From Brindavan he wrote a letter to Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj informing Swamiji that he had renounced hearth and home and was on his way to find a suitable place to settle down for Sadhana in seclusion. To his great astonishment Swamiji wrote back to him that as he was still very young he might continue to serve his relations, work as a teacher and serve the sick. He felt surprised with this advice as in his earlier letters Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj had instructed him again and again to leave the world at once. This was, in fact, the final test for Sridhara. Maya can have many forms. For

the higher type of men Maya takes the subtle form of apparently unassailable human ideals. It seemed Gurudev Sivananda was only trying to test the depth of Sridhara's dispassion for samsara and passion for God. Sridhara's reply revealed that he was already beyond Maya. He politely wrote to Gurudev a brief note saying merely that returning home was unthinkable on his part and that he had already decided to take shelter at his lotus feet. Gurudev was immensely pleased with this letter and replied his consent.

From Brindavan he journeyed to Haridwar where he resided at Kankhal in the Ashram of Ramakrishna Mission for ten days. Now he was keen to meet his Holy Master and surrender at his lotus feet for all time to come. It was the Buddha Purnima day of 1943. It was a very hot day, the 19th of May when at about 2 p.m. he left Haridwar for Rishikesh by bus. This day proved to be a very significant one in the career of Sridhara, in the history of the Divine Life Society and in the history of the spiritual renaissance of the twentieth century. Dressed in a simple coarse Khaddar pyjama and Khaddar shirt, with a staff in his hand Sridhara made his unassuming entry into the Sivananda Ashram. It was about 5.00 p.m. Swami Sivanandaji had gone up the hill to the temple of Lord Viswanath. A Nepali porter advised Sridhara to wait near the Ramashram Library adjacent to the holy Ashram of Swami Sivanandaji. Sridhara waited there with sugar candy in his hands, his eyes wet with the deepest devotion. The twilight was deepening. The full moon had just arisen on the sacred Buddha Purnima day. Gurudev came striding down hill from the temple. While Ganga was glittering under the soothing moonlight, the future full moon of the Divine Life Society saluted the wisdom-light of Ananda Kutir. Sridhara beheld his spiritual father. He prostrated at the lotus feet of the Master, offering the sugar candy as a token of his sweet and humble submission and after prostrating thrice on the ground announced with utmost humility

that he was Sridhara Rao from Madras. Gurudev asked him in a Marathi sentence about his health, as though he knew him for a long time. To him Sridhara was not a stranger at all. He knew that his successor had arrived. Similar was the experience of Sridhara. To him it was a beautiful homecoming. In a very informal way Gurudev told him to attend the evening Satsanga and meet him in his Kutir early in the morning the next day.

Thus, at last, Sridhara found his anchor at the lotus feet of Sivananda. Guru is God. God is Guru. The Lord says in the Srimad Bhagavata: "Verily know the Acharya as Me; never disregard him; nor underestimate him as a mere man. Guru is all the deities unified into one". Sridhara was now face to face with his Supreme Deity, his Guru, Swami Sivananda, the world-teacher, a great God-realised soul. He had journeyed long in quest of God and had now reached the gateway of the promised land.

CHAPTER THREE

TWENTY YEARS OF DISCIPLESHIP

The spiritual titan to whose divine care Sridhara offered himself that blessed day on the consecrated grounds of Rishikesh was born on the 8th September, 1887, at Pattamadai in the Tirunelvely district of Tamil Nadu. He was born in the eighteenth generation of the illustrious sage, famed Saivite teacher, Appayya Dikshitar. Kuppuswami, as he was called, was born of parents noted for their piety—Sri Vengu Iyer and Smt. Parvati Ammal. He grew into a brilliant young man. Being naturally drawn towards the poor and the sick he went for medical education and qualified himself as a doctor. Destiny took him to Malaya where he served people for about a decade. The young doctor from India was equally at home with poor and rich, sophisticated and illiterate, and quickly earned fame as a good Samaritan to whom work was worship. While the miseries of his fellow beings kept him unremittingly active, slowly his early ebullience subsided and a thoughtful, brooding disposition developed in him. He began to read a great deal of religious literature. Gradually, the truth dawned upon him that there is a state of beatitude, bliss and eternal peace beyond the world of disease, pain, suffering, and tears and that it was something which each man could achieve. Hence he threw off a prosperous career and one day in 1923 quietly left Malaya and came over to the Himalayas in search of a guide and a suitable environment for doing penance. In the year 1924, he met Swami Viswananda on the banks of Ganga at Rishikesh and begged holy initiation of him. Swami Viswananda initiated him into the holy order of Sannyasa on 1st June, 1924, giving him the name Swami Sivananda. For about a decade the new doctor-turned Sannyasin plunged into a period of

intense penance, austerity, Yoga practice and deep meditation. This intense Sadhana drew down upon him the Divine Grace and blessings of the Almighty Lord who conferred upon him supreme Self-realisation attaining which he shone as a liberated sage.

To this peerless saint of the Himalayas Gurudom was a deadly canker. But in obedience to the command of the Almighty he now turned his attention to Loka-Sangraha. He founded the Divine Life Society in 1936 and spread the message of Yoga and Vedanta through the length and breadth of India, nay, throughout the globe. He lived to serve and awaken humanity from its slumber of ignorance. **Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realise**—these were his cardinal teachings. The dissemination of spiritual knowledge through printed literature, the undertaking of wide-ranging spiritual tours, holding of religious conferences and, last but not the least, the dynamic propagation of the practice of the Divine Name of God became the cornerstones of his Mission. Monks and materialists alike flocked to him in tens of thousands. Advanced aspirants and veteran Yogis learnt from him lessons in Yoga and Vedanta and some of them settled down with him as inmates of the Ashram. They were all very sincere Sadhaks, some of them highly advanced souls, who now offered themselves as instruments of Gurudev's Mission of love and charity. But the sage of Ananda Kutir was still waiting for the one who would truly relieve him of all that onerous responsibility, his chosen son to whom he could make over his spiritual treasure for the service of the children of God. That man of immaculate purity, and invincible temerity was Sridhara, the born saint. He was cast in the very same mould as his Master. He was unsurpassed in the service of the poor, the sick and the down-trodden. Matchless, too, was his catholic faith and his tender solicitude for all living creatures. His self-effacement and consideration for others was exemplary. With him the practice of

Following the footsteps of the Master

At the feet of the Holy Master

devotion and meditation was a natural, graceful thing—the outcome of his spontaneous, burning desire for liberation. He took to the psychology and the habits of a monk as a fish to water. His contact with sages like Ramana Maharshi, Malayala Swami and Swami Ramdas had already produced in him an exalted state of divine consciousness. As the oyster under the influence of the Svati star he now treasured the precious drops of Sivananda-wisdom in the very core of his heart.

One day the Holy Master called Sridhara to his side and said: "I grieve to find that many a time my own students fail to catch my meaning when I urge them to dedicate their very lives to the cause of selfless service. In no way do I mean that they should neglect personal Sadhana in the name of other duties. But systematic Sadhana at a set period daily in the early morning and at evening twilight is not at all incompatible with active work during the rest of the day. The point I stress is that even the work should become spiritual Sadhana by the adoption of the Bhava of Akarta, Abhokta or Iswararpana and Nimittamatram Aham". Sridhara listened to these words of wisdom and forthwith entered into the mission of Sivananda and dedicated his whole being to the noble cause. The spiritual titan entered into his very habits of thought and to the great satisfaction of the Master he now plunged into dynamic service.

Early Training

During those early days Sivananda Ashram was a veritable hermitage. The presiding hermit there was the illumined Yogi of the highest order. He kept near him only eight disciples—Swami Krishnanandaji (not to be confused with the present General Secretary), Swami Visuddhanandaji, Visweswar Swamiji, Govinda Swamiji, Purnabodh Swamiji, Saswata Swamiji, Ramachandra Swamiji and Narayana Swamiji—all Sadhaks of a very high order. The ninth jewel—he was, indeed, to be the crest-jewel—was Sridhara Rao, who soon became

well-known as Rao Swamiji. To the new Swami no work was mean: all was a worship, equally dedicated at the holy feet of his Master. Swami Krishnanandaji, who was the General Secretary of the Divine Life Society during the period from 1942 to 1944, entrusted him first the task of writing addresses and pasting labels on the flap of the monthly magazine, "The Divine Life", to be despatched to different places. Rao Swamiji wrote the addresses with supreme sincerity. He was then asked to arrange the books of the library. Raoji not merely dusted them and kept them neatly ordered in the shelves, he also closed the books with cover, showing the same zeal and sincerity as he would have shown for Yogic Sadhana. He used to share the work of sweeping the floors, looking after guests and patients, help filling the tank with water from the Ganga, spreading carpet on the floor, getting firewood from the forest, washing vessels and serving in the kitchen, conducting worship in the temple and also writing letters, typing manuscripts and delivering elevating talks in the evening Satsangs and other religious functions. With all these chores he remained serene and spiritually vibrant all the time, for work itself was his manner of offering worship. Gurudev was a hard task master, a loving father, a solicitous mother and something else besides. The divine grace and tenderness which flowed from his consecrated will filled Rao Swamiji with indescribable joy. Gurudev soon discovered that Sridhara was not an ordinary personality who could be either overwhelmed or bound down by any kind of work. Perceiving his higher destiny, Gurudev would ask him periodically to stop all work for a few days and have all the time to himself. Sridhara would at once slip into the life of withdrawn introspection, roaming about in the woods, drinking in the silence and calm of sequestered spots and tuning himself to the cosmic harmony. He was free to merge himself in service or Sadhana as and when he wished.

Service of the Sick

Within ten days from his admission into the Sivananda Ashram, Sridhara came to be called by the people of the locality as Dr. Raoji. He was not a physician with a Degree, of course. But his long and dedicated service of the lepers and the poor had made such work second nature to him and he had grown very efficient in tending the sick. If there was any passion in his heart connected with the world, it was this. He earned the title of a doctor in revealing circumstances. Once when he went out for a walk he met a leper on the way and asked him to come to the Ashram dispensary for treatment. When the patient approached the precincts of the Ashram, almost every one there expressed his annoyance. But Gurudev not only permitted the leper to be treated by Dr. Raoji but expressed his deep appreciation of the spiritual advancement, evidenced by the young Brahmachari's act of mercy. Thereafter Sridhara began the treatment of leprosy in the Ashram hospital in a regular manner. Gurudev joyously watched this extraordinary devotion of the neophyte and himself arranged the feeding of those lepers on the last day of every month. As ever, the young Brahmachari and the veteran Master were one in spirit. The patients who came to the Ashram's allopathic dispensary felt that like Dr. Sivanandaji, Dr. Raoji was also a Mahatma with extraordinary powers of healing. For practical treatment, Dr. Raoji had mastered books like Satish Chandra Dasgupta's 'Home and Village Doctor', 'Family doctor' by Swami Sivananda and 'Materia Medica' of Rakhal Dasgupta; but, what was really significant was that he showed his real love and sincere solicitude to those ailing patients who now came in large numbers, preferring his blessing to the advice of well-qualified medical experts. Acting on the maxim that 'A doctor's time is not his own'. Sridhara devoted his entire time for the treatment of the sick, ignoring his own meals and rest. Sometimes his healing touch worked miracles. Once on a dark summer night an old lady appeared before him with her little girl

who had been stung by a poisonous scorpion. The compassionate one immediately called her to his Kutir and led her by the flash of his torch. He did not have to apply any medicine. He only rubbed his little towel on the affected part chanting all the while the Lord's Names on his lips. The girl was instantaneously cured. Such was the power of love generated by the compassionate doctor that even the poison lost its virulence. His compassion was all-embracing and inexhaustible. He extended it not merely to human beings but also to animals, birds and insects. One day he noticed a dog lying near the office room of the Ashram. It was full of sores and worms. It was clear that it had been in agony for some time. The tender heart of Rao Swamiji bled at the pathetic sight. He gave some medicines and injections and dressed its affected parts with proper bandage and slept near the door tending it the whole night. When the Ashramites saw this in the morning they were simply dazed. Gurudev remarked that Rao Swamiji was not a man but the very personification of compassion. Such was the sincerity and devotion of this man of compassion that he devoted himself to the care of the dog for nearly two months and did not discharge it till it had been fully cured. Gurudev commented in a cryptic manner, "Dr. Rao has surpassed Dr. Sivananda". This doctor of doctors, who without being trained in a medical college became the master of medicine, roamed from village to village and extended medical aid to the common folk of the mountain regions. During those days people used to die in large numbers for want of medical facilities and to them this compassionate Brahmachari of the Sivanandashram appeared as a veritable Dhanvantari. One would need angels' tongues to bring out to the full the supreme qualities of compassion, dedication, humility and magnanimity demonstrated by Rao Swamiji in course of his service of the sick people in and around Rishikesh during those days. Whenever extolled by others the simple Swamiji would say meekly that he had learnt some little thing from the life of the Master. He

had learnt some little thing from the life of the Master. He would then entertain them with stories of Gurudev's service when Swami Sivananda himself was practising Sadhana on the banks of the Ganga, facts he had gathered from the Master's early life at Swargashram. He would narrate with deep feeling how Gurudev used to attend to elderly monks and patients, bringing water for them from the Ganga, cleaning their rooms with broomstick, washing their clothes and even cleaning their latrines.

Daily Sadhana

From his early days Sridhara had been established in the triune virtues of truth, universal love and purity. A perfect Brahmachari, he was always radiant with the sublime spiritual energy or Ojas Shakti. Moreover, constantly responsive to the immanence of God in all that moved and breathed he was eternally engaged in His worship. It would, therefore, appear that a strict schedule of daily Sadhana was not essential for him. But he always remembered the famous expression of Totapuri that in order that its lustre is maintained the brass pot has to be rubbed everyday. Like Gurudev he used to emphasise, "The body is always a donkey and the mind a monkey to the last. So the Adhyatmic whip and the cane of Titiksha, Tapasya etc. must be kept in readiness always". Similarly he was one in opinion with Gurudev who would frequently warn, "Even if you are a Jivanmukta, you must be careful." Rao Swamiji, so ran the verdict of Gurudev, was a born Siddha. Yet he always thought of himself as only a beginner, just stepping into the spiritual field. So he took resort to periodical fasts, sudden acts of personal denial and endurance.

Endurance was a quality that Sridhara had assiduously cultivated and possessed in abundance even before he came to the Ashram. Yet not a day elapsed when he did not expose himself to some gruelling test or the other, for Titiksha is the real wealth of an ascetic. In

Gita the Lord exhorts the aspirant to put up with pleasure and pain, heat and cold, with equanimity, for they are equally transitory. Rao Swamiji had the additional inspiration from being close to a person who was an exemplary living Titikshu, his own Guru Sivananda. Even in the early days of his spiritual practice the Master had a reputation for his virtue of endurance. Lest there should be any interruption in his Sadhana, instead of visiting the Annakshetra daily for his meagre ration, Sivananda used to preserve the body on pieces of stale bread he had collected for the purpose and continue his meditation for days on end. He was accustomed thus to keep some parched, leathery bread with him and whenever there was hunger he would just soak it in the Ganga water and eat it. It meant that sometimes he was to subsist for a week on a day's ration. This virtue of Titiksha—very carefully preserved by the Master even at that time—exerted a profound influence on Raoji, who read intently, as we gather from his Light Fountain, from the pages of the inner life of Gurudev. The life of Gurudev was not a hidden text. It was known to everybody. But very few could read it like Sridhara, with real discrimination and deeper understanding. And still fewer could profit from the study. Hearing of Gurudev's early Swargashram life Rao Swamiji felt so inspired that, as we learn from his Sevaks, one day he thought of giving his body, which had been brought up in luxury, a real lesson. So thinking, he came out of his Kutir in a winter night and sat through till dawn without a cover. In this state he remained impassive while a nipping wind blew against his shrunken frame, shaking it to the bones. Thus he kept the blaze of Tapas steady and constant.

In his early days in the Ashram Swamiji used to plunge into Japa and meditation for long hours at a stretch in secluded sites. Very often he used to undertake the difficult ascent to the shrine of Nilakantha Mahadev, about seven miles from Swargashram on the other side of Ganga across the majestic Manikoot

mountain and there plunge into deep meditation in its sequestered calm and merge in Samadhi, transcending the flux of time. Sometimes he chose Brahmapuri as his seat of penance. There is a cave in that locality where Swami Ram Tirtha used to perform rigorous penance, a place not easily accessible, infested by snakes, etc. In such sanctified but remote spots Swamiji used to carry on his higher Sadhana, far away from the haunts of men. Sometimes, with the permission of Gurudev he used to proceed to Phulchati or Garud Chatti in quest of inner peace and silence. He used to carry a little liquid diet for bodily subsistence and meditate there for days on end. A few Tatwalas, a group of Titikshus noted for their extraordinarily rigorous penance earning the title on account of using only pieces of gunny bag to cover themselves—vouchsafed later that they had often seen Swamiji doing Tapasya and meditation enduring great hardships. The present author learnt from Swami Dhyananandaji that once a Tatwala ascetic who stayed at Bhutanath cave for about thirty years informed some devotees of Swamiji that Swamiji as a Brahmachari used to come to that cave for quiet meditation. The ascetic admitted to have felt even during those early days a profound sense of admiration for the young Brahmachari on account of his exemplary humility, kindness and fearlessness. Thus it went on—long stretches of intense meditation followed by periods of hard unremitting labour among fellow Ashramites.

He observed with close attention how, in spite of his dynamism and brisk activities in the interest of Lokasamgraha, Gurudev was always at heart a Virakta Sannyasi with the flame of dispassion burning steadily within. He noted how although Gurudev was physically present among them all the while, every now and then he would retire into such a state of total inwardness that one would be hard put to claim that he was actually there. It was, indeed, the wonderful Nishprapancha Avastha as has been described in the scriptures. He also

beyond all Ashramas—a crystal without any colour, which yet kept twenty young Sannyasins of very high calibre charged by and tethered to his personality of as many forms. When Gurudev used to come out of his Kutir, he was like Guru Govind Singh, exhorting, guiding and acting. Inside his Kutir, he was like Guru Nanak, self-immersed in his Sahaja Avastha.

It was this lesson that Rao Swamiji learnt from the life of his Master. Like Gurudev, in spite of his ceaseless activities from dawn to night, he was, as even today, always in possession of the Santa Samahita Chitta, the quiescent, absorbed inner state, wherein one communed with divinity. His intimate friend, an advanced Jnana Yogi of a very high order, Swami Krishnanandaji, could recognise this state as being one, where there is nothing save Rama—Sarvam Rama-mayam Jagat. This realisation permeated all the activities of Rao Swamiji and he appeared as the very incarnation of humility. Like a blade of grass he was now meek, serene and self-effacing at all moments and with everybody. Persons like Swami Krishnanandaji from their exalted Yogic plane could properly appreciate this lofty spiritual state of their senior Guru Bhai and a great many of them testified to the extraordinary spiritual height already ascended by the young Rao Swamiji. It was, of course, easy for Gurudev to correctly gauge the unique and exalted state of his most beloved disciple. Very soon he announced, "Rao Swamiji should be relieved of all the work. But I want him to hold the high office of the General Secretary. It is a great honour for the Society itself to have such a great saint as a General Secretary".

Sannyasa Diksha

It is worth remembering at this stage that Swamiji had not yet donned the ochre garb. Yet he was already being honoured by great Mahatmas, who spontaneously bowed down at his feet. His selfless service of the sick had earned for him the love, admiration and gratitude of

had earned for him the love, admiration and gratitude of the people of the neighbourhood. And now his spiritual fervour and wisdom won for him the reverence of the saints of Rishikesh. But with all that Swamiji still used to say in great humility that he was not yet qualified to dawn the saffron garb. All the same Gurudev felt happily impelled to confer that insignia of supreme sacrifice on Sridhara with the befitting title, Swami Chidananda, the one who is ever established in bliss and enlightenment. Gurudev always used to sing—"I am Chidananda. I am Chidananda. I am Chidananda. In all conditions I am Knowledge, Bliss Absolute." He identified himself with Chidananda. Accordingly he christened his most beloved disciple. The new monastic name was only a formal recognition for the young monk who seemed to have long achieved that state. Thus it was that on the most holy Guru Purnima day—10th July, 1949—a most significant day in the calendar of the Divine Life Society and of the world, in a formal ceremony of great solemnity, Sridhara renounced the pleasures of this world and of the next and entered into the holy order of the Sannyas of the line of Saraswati. The order itself was glorified in embracing Sridhara when he performed the Viraja Homa and offered his Purvashram as oblation in the sacred fire and linked himself to the chain of Brahma Vidya Gurus by assuming the new name—Swami Chidananda Saraswati.

Liberated One

In spite of his brisk activities which the exigencies of the situation demanded, Swamiji's real bed-rock of life from now onwards, was one of continuous contemplation. He used to catch every opportunity available to him to retire to places of seclusion and remain merged in inner silence and Samadhi. On one occasion he went out of the Ashram sometime during the afternoon and reached Lakshmana Kunda around 3 p.m. In an easy natural style he sank into deep meditation

there, suspending his earthly consciousness. Very soon he felt propelled into a superconscious state where the mind is totally annihilated. He came back to his normal physical consciousness very late in the evening, around 9 p.m., when it was intensely dark. Swamiji was so much filled with supramundane bliss that even that fearsome darkness made little impression on him and only towards midnight he retraced, his silent steps to the Ashram.

Swami Chidananda could no more remain a hidden treasure in the Ashram. The aroma of his life divine perfumed his environment and spread out all over. Whoever beheld him hereafter found something extraordinarily magnetic and lustrous about his person. The great event was, of course, clearly known to Gurudev himself, a God-realised saint of very high order. Swami Sivananda now openly proclaimed that the present life of Chidananda was his last birth. He told his disciples, "Chidanandaji is a saint. You should worship him. He is your Guru". It did not take long for the leading disciples of that Holy Master, too, to recognise Swami Chidananda's liberated status. Swami Paramanandaji, the senior-most disciple of Gurudev and the first General Secretary of the Divine Life Society, for instance, brought this fact home to the Ashramites by presenting a beautiful picture of the liberated sage which he saw in Swami Chidanandaji. Let us hear the words of the great Sadhak: "I have seen him feeding and serving cats, dogs and monkeys. When the Ashram is in a financial crisis he spends a lot in treating a sickly dog with costly injections. When hundreds of letters are waiting for reply, he will be giving Upadesh to boys and girls of the locality and entertaining them with sweets, biscuits and fruits. Even when he does not have time to attend to his personal affairs he will be spending hours in satisfying a sick person or in admiring an insect or a lovely flower... I only feel that if I had only a thousandth part of Swami Chidanandaji's knowledge, capacity and devotion to the

lotus feet of the Master for all the years I have spent in close touch of the Master I would have attained the position of the famous Trotakacharya". Swami Harisharananandaji, another veteran disciple of Gurudev, called to their attention the same thing: "Swami Chidanandaji does the funeral rites of even cats and monkeys: he chants Mantras and does Kirtan. This is Nishkamya Seva. This is supreme cosmic love. Chidanandaji is filled with the feeling that whoever comes in contact with him is Narayana." Sri Narayana Swamiji summed up Chidanandaji's attainments and said, "In short he is a master of many arts. He is an ideal Sadhak, an ideal disciple, a true friend of the sick and poor. He is a philosopher; he is a Raja Yogi, he is a saint". Swami Venkatesanandaji, the famous chronicler of the Ashram in Gurudev's times, addressed Swami Chidanandaji in a felicitation in 1954 with the following words: "Blessed is the land that has given birth to a Mahapurusha like you. Blessed are the people who are fortunate enough to enjoy your Satsang even for a while. Blessed is the age in which you have chosen to incarnate on this earth".

The halo of his own life, the open declarations made by the Great Master, testimonies of countless Mahatmas—all these inexorably lead to the conclusion that Swamiji's present sojourn in this earth plane is that of a liberated one, a Jivanmukta. When exactly he attained the Supreme Self-realisation will, of course, forever, remain a mystery. The writer of this present volume once approached Swamiji to kindly enlighten him on the matter. But Swamiji categorically answered, "This is a secret between Gurudev and myself. I am not authorised to divulge it." In fact, when Gurudev Sivananda was asked on such matters he too answered in a similar manner, and added that the Srutis had forbidden to say anything on this point. In the case of Swami Chidananda, especially, it is almost impossible to make him emphasise any of his great achievements.

Whenever he is pressed to offer his comments he would always divert the issue and convert it into an occasion for showering praises on some one or the other, neatly slipping off himself from the focus. In a provincial Divine Life Conference a certain devotee asked him with sincere and deep fervour, "I want to be initiated by a realised soul. Are you, Sir, a God realised Soul?" Swamiji replied, "I am only a servant of Gurudev and an unworthy slave of God. I do not know if I am a God-realised soul or not. God alone knows this". Kenopanishad (II.3) has precisely stated that the God-realised seer has not the slightest ego to announce that he has realised God. The words of Swamiji in the light of the revealed scripture indicate not only a person of supreme spiritual attainments but also one who has entirely surrendered everything including his very Self at the feet of God and Gurudev.

In those days Swamiji had decided to retire permanently from the Ashram to the life of a recluse, a wandering monk without any cares whatsoever, leaving everything in the hands of the Lord Almighty. His inner thoughts were revealed on hundreds of occasions, small and big. In one of his letters he later described the mood, "My whole being was powerfully drawn towards seclusion and a life of solitary contemplation and indrawnness. Ever since 1956 I had been urged towards that path". A close study of his life, the development of certain traits in his personality in a pronounced manner, the statements of his Master and fellow Sadhaks and the testimony of a number of devotees lead to the conclusion that when his thirty ninth birthday was celebrated in 1954 he was certainly a full blown Jnani, an illumined soul with the highest spiritual attainments. No wonder, therefore, that Gurudev Sivananda himself declared that Swami Chidananda was Adhyatma Jnana Jyoti, an embodiment of the Brahma Sutras and the Gita, who brought Upanishads from his heart. He made it open to all that the present life of Chidananda was his last birth.

Service of the Mission

Throughout his long span of discipleship Swamiji has followed one great maxim—Master's word is law. He is ever the egoless flute and Gurudev the flute-player. He had no ambitions in life, not even the Satsankalpa of founding a mission. His relation with the Sivanandashram was entirely spiritual. He did not have any desire for institutional expansion. It was all God's Will that an amazingly multifaceted and extensive development of the Divine Life Society took place. His service for the Ashram was nothing but the worship of his Holy Master. When he joined the Ashram in 1943 he was the leading one among those distinguished Sadhaks who raised aloft the banner of Gurudev's mission by making untiring efforts and projecting the Master's thoughts throughout the land of Bharatavarsha. The Master himself had been quick to discover the tremendous potentialities in his new-found disciple and the inmates of the Ashram soon realised that Swami Chidanandaji was almost a replica of Gurudev. Right in the forties, pointing to the young Brahmachari Sridhara Rao, Gurudev had told Major General A.N. Sharma, one of his good old devotees, "My successor has come". The young Brahmachari for his part was fully responsive to the call of the Master. Close observation, intimate exchanges and repeated meditations had rendered him wonderfully sensitive and alert to the thoughts and inner desires of Gurudev. His Light Foutain—a biographical piece on his Master which will for ever be read by all inquisitive readers as an incomparable spiritual document—bears thrilling witness to that deep appreciation. It is a masterful biographical writing distinguished by a purity of style, and, profound knowledge of its subject. The entirely unobtrusive manner of its presentation makes the reader always encounter in the pages Sivananda and not the author. Gurudev himself was so much impressed by the spiritual

fervour and wisdom contained in the book that he remarked, "Sivananda will pass away but 'Light Fountain' will live". While releasing the book in 1944 Swamiji had chosen to keep the authorship concealed under the pen name, prism. Chidananda is, indeed, the holy prism through which Gurudev had chosen to reveal his multicoloured personality for the benefit of the world.

Therefore, Chidananda came to be looked upon by one and all in the Ashram as Gurudev's Deputy in all matters. He was the chief speaker on all special functions. Before the distinguished visitors and aspirants in the Ashram he was the right interpreter of Gurudev's ideals. In the process he would always let the newcomer encounter some deep mystery, some profound wisdom of the sages. Gurudev commented that in all his soul-stirring lectures Chidanandaji presented esoteric Upanishadic wisdom without tackling the text with any 'intellectual' approach. Sometimes, keeping himself unannounced, he used to enrich the pages of the monthly magazine "The Divine Life". Articles such as "Swami Sivananda as he is today—a study", "The Great Ones", published under his pen name, Kausik, were stirring spiritual texts. Most of his illuminating lectures delivered during those days were compiled by Swami Venkatesanandaji. Subsequently they were released under the caption, "Forest Academy Lectures on Yoga". Gurudev himself was so much impressed by those lectures that in the introduction to the first edition of the book he referred to the work as "a thrilling volume of highly inspiring lectures of Swami Chidananda, a great saint and a spiritual leader. The lectures cover all the subjects of life and I have no doubt that the publication of this volume will serve the cause of preservation of our ancient Dharma, Culture and way of life".

Swamiji dedicated himself to the dissemination of spiritual knowledge, the esoteric meaning and practical application of Yoga Sastras through the Yoga-Vedanta Forest University (now Academy) where Gurudev had

application of Yoga Sastras through the Yoga-Vedanta Forest University (now Academy) where Gurudev had appointed him as the Professor of Raja Yoga. Several veteran disciples contributed towards the success of this institution. But Swami Chidananda and Swami Krishnananda were the guiding lights of the Academy. Chidananda considered the university to be a "Unique Adhyatmic Nursery" amidst a forest clearing on the slope of a hill leading down to the sandy bank of the swift and majestic Ganga. The Holy Master appointed him as the first Vice-Chancellor in addition to his being the Professor of Raja Yoga. The students did not always have to wait to hear the learned talks of Chidananda. Chidananda's life itself was the greatest lesson to them. In fact, a serious student of Yoga can learn much about ethical discipline, conquest of mind and super-conscious experience merely by watching him from a distance. Even while presiding in the assembly of thousands Swamiji often withdraws himself into a state of deep meditation, radiating a divine glow from his serene countenance. Even as he engages himself in dynamic service, he is ever established in supreme dispassion and detachment. His lectures on Raja Yoga had the authority of direct experience and were, therefore, highly effective. Swami Krishnananda, Professor of Vedanta, was similarly a powerful force generating currents of Upanishadic thought in the minds of his students. He himself was an illustration of Sadhana Chatustaya of Jnana Yoga. About these two spiritual stalwarts the Master once said, "Look at the wisdom that Chidanandaji and Krishnanandaji possess. Kings and Presidents will bow at their feet. The world will pay homage to the dust of their feet. You should all take the dust of their feet and wear it on your forehead with great reverence and devotion. At what young age they have renounced the world! What must be the depth of their yearning for knowledge! What must be the intensity of their Vairagya! People from all over the world will fall at the feet of people

like Chidanandaji and Krishnanandaji to learn the fundamentals of Philosophy and Yoga. They are real emperors."

Another stalwart in Yoga, Swami Harisharananandaji taught both by personal example and precepts the approach of Bhakti Yoga. Swami Vishnudevanandaji, the peerless Hatha Yogi taught Hatha Yoga. There were many others sharing the work. Mention may be made of Swami Chinmayanandaji, Swami Venkatesanandaji, Swami Satyanandaji and Swami Saswatanandaji. They all rendered valuable services to the Academy. Swami Harisharananandaji, reminiscing on those good old days, once commented that the twelve years—1945 to 1957—will never again appear. They were those momentous years when Yoga Sadhana Kutir of Sivanandashram was teeming with dedicated Sadhaks and saints—Swami Chidananda in Room No. 1 and 2, Swami Krishnananda in Room No. 3, Swami Hari Om Ananda in Room No. 4, Swami Harisharanananda in Room No. 5 and Swami Saswatananda in Room No. 6, and thus further down a long list of names. Chidananda was the leader of this wonderful team of saint-scholars.

In the beginning he offered a course on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. A few of those lectures were incorporated in his book Yoga and, subsequently most of the whole discourse was published in the form of a book—Path to Blessedness. It was indeed, a holy privilege for those Brahmacharis who listened to his discourses during the Brahma Muhurta class on alternate days for more than a year.

As if all that work in the office, the class-room and the neighbourhood was not enough, more duties were piled on his shoulders. One day at about 10 a.m. while he was casually loitering on the bank of the Ganga he noticed Gurudev coming out of his Kutir. The Holy Master walked up to Narayan Swamiji, who was then

one monthly magazine. Start a weekly or even a daily magazine". The treasurer Swamiji told, "There will be heavy expenditure on postage". Gurudev's simple reply was—"God will give. Do it now". So saying, he instructed Chidanandaji and other Sadhaks to plunge into the preparation of the daily, weekly and monthly divine injections in the Sivananda laboratory for quick and instantaneous action on the indolent Sadhaks. Thus was started a daily bulletin printed in a duplicator. A series of magazines called 'Jnana Surya Series', 'Ken Series', 'Yoga Vedanta Forest University Weekly', Wisdom Light', 'Health and Long Life', 'Branch Gazette', 'The Divine Life' and 'Yoga Vedanta' were the spiritual sparks that came out of the anvil of the Forest University.

In course of all these varied undertakings Swami Chidanandaji was always keen to innovate and project the eternal truths in novel and interesting forms so as to attract the ordinary people towards the path of the Yoga of Synthesis. For example, he developed the idea of establishing a spiritual museum so that the most important matters of Yoga could be projected interestingly through various tokens, books or pictures, and inquisitive visitors could be conducted through the hall by a trained guide. He wished that a visit into the museum could be a digest course on Sadhana. The necessary materials for giving shape to the museum for the benefit of neophytes in Yoga were zealously collected by Swamiji himself and arranged neatly. Intricate lessons of Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, Japa Yoga and Tantra Yoga were illustrated with the aid of pictorial representations and thus the Yoga Museum was born in 1947. This spiritual banquet was at first spread in the Bhajan Hall and was subsequently shifted to another hall which came to be known as the Yoga Museum Hall. It was a source of education and delight at the same time.

In December 1947 Swamiji fell ill with Malaria. Gurudev sent him in the company of Swami

Visvesvaranandaji to Nagpur for rest and through medical treatment under a pious doctor, Sri B.A. Vaidya, who had his own clinic at Dhantoli and was a highly respected honorary physician in the Mayo Hospital at Nagpur. It was during his stay here that Swamiji heard in the hospital radio about the shocking news of Gandhiji's assassination. Although he was a patient there he was requested to conduct a prayer meeting and offer his condolence on the passing away of that great soul.

Swamiji came back to the Ashram after his recovery. At that time Swami Nijabodhaji who had been the General Secretary of the Divine Life Society from 1944 was about to retire from the taxing job. Gurudev now asked Chidanandaji to take over. Swamiji was to hold the post for fifteen long years, till 1963.

Swamiji was, in any case, the uncrowned leader of the tireless team of Sadhaks. Now Gurudev gave it a formal recognition. But, of course, it also meant a further increase in his daily duties. Remarkable, indeed, was his equipoise as he attended to so much of work every day for long years. Again, even though he occupied the distinguished post of General Secretary of an international organisation, he was never for a moment elated or officious. He used to put on clothes that did not stretch beyond his knees. Gurudev once accosted him jestingly, "Ohji! you are the General Secretary of the Divine Life Society. Why don't you put on nice long clothes?" Swamiji meekly answered that he preferred to put on those little towels in the interest of agile movement in his multifaceted daily work. Indeed, Swamiji used to remain so engrossed in a multitude of work, ignoring his physical well-being altogether, that during such busy periods Gurudev used to put up a sign: "People can see Chidananda only for five minutes each between 9 and 10 a.m."

Thirty-Ninth Birthday

Gurudev began celebrating the birthday of his most beloved disciple every year—he did it on the 24th June, and, not on 24th September, which was Swamiji's actual birthday. As his own birthday was celebrated by the Ashramites every year on the 8th September he did not want to lessen the importance of Chidananda's birthday-celebration by holding it only a few days later. Therefore, for many years he celebrated Chidananda Jayanti in the month of June. The thirty-ninth birthday of Swami Chidananda, in particular, was celebrated at the behest of the Holy Master with grand, festive rejoicings and great solemnity. Gurudev declared on this occasion, "Celebration of Swami Chidanandaji's birthday is really worship of God." He acknowledged Swamiji's attainment of the highest knowledge and honoured him with the sacred title of Adhyatma Jnana Jyoti. Swamiji was hailed by the devotees and seekers as Divinity incarnate. In his answer to the felicitations he said that he humbly accepted all their kind wishes and comments, and then emphasised that all that was only Guru Kripa. He likened himself to a piece of sculpture and said that if at all there was any beauty in the statue, the credit was to go to the sculptor. He concluded by saying, "The divine engineer of Swami Chidananda is Swami Sivananda". It is of interest to note that on this sacred occasion the brother disciples did Pada Puja of Swami Chidananda, lovingly and reverently bathing his feet with milk and Ganga water, offering flowers and waving camphor, as if they were verily Gurudev's own holy feet.

Life of Seclusion

From this time onwards Chidananda longed to lead a life of complete seclusion and solitary contemplation. Gurudev understood his state of mind and advised him to go to the sequestered spot of Badri Narayan in order that he might pursue the highest level of Sadhana there

with no distractions whatsoever. Thus for ten days in early October, 1956, Swamiji engaged himself in intense contemplation on the most holy site of Badrinath Dham, the place where Nara and Narayan are said to be performing eternal penance. He offered his Tapascharya for the well-being of the entire humanity.

This short period of seclusion and inner contemplation was followed by a period of dynamic service. From the peak of the Himalayas Swamiji came down hurriedly in obedience to the orders of the Master who had decided to depute him to preside over the eighth All-India Divine Life Conference at Kolkata, scheduled from 19th October to 22nd October. On his way down he met torrential rains. Bridges were broken and the roads were unsafe. Braving every odd and discomfort, drenched through and through, he kept a steady pace and returned to Gurudev exactly on the day he had promised to rejoin the Master[6].

Swamiji reached Kolkata just in time to preside over the conference which was formally inaugurated by Dr. Kalidas Nag. Exerting the full force of his recently acquired spiritual vitality he produced an indelible impact on the masses. From Kolkata Swamiji proceeded to Gujarat to preside over the Ninth All-India Divine Life Conference at Patan. As in Kolkata, here too he overwhelmed the audience with his extraordinary charm and spiritual force.

After this brief period of brisk and dynamic service Swamiji's inner being was once again powerfully drawn towards seclusion and silence. He sought the permission of the Master to retire to some unfrequented rock high up in the Himalayas and remain there completely absorbed in a state of blissful union with the Lord. But he could not free himself from the pressing duties of the Ashram

6 *It was on this trip that Swamiji met Sri Jai Prakash Narain the well-known Sarvodaya leader, who was also undergoing similar hardship in course of his upward journey from Badrinath Dham.*

and it was only in the summer of 1958 he undertook his second trip to Badrinath Dham planning a protracted Tapascharya. This time he went by foot and scaled the hills with great physical strain. At night he used to take shelter in the huts of shepherds and, sleep on their straw beds surrounded by the sheep. He felt an extraordinary sense of peace and bliss amid all the hardships of the journey. On the way he halted in a temple where the Siva Lingam was covered with ice. In that tranquil and rarefied height there was no one save the Lord revealing Himself to the seeker in the bliss of solitude. Swami Vivekananda had a similar experience in the course of his Parivrajaka life at Amarnath. Reaching Badrinath he took a bath in the river Alakananda and got himself firmly seated in Yoga in a blissful state for a long, long time.

In the Western Hemisphere

It was again the Will of the Lord that brought him down to Lokasangraha while he was eager to permanently enter into Nirvikalpa Samadhi and throw off the physical frame. God's Will, manifesting itself through the Satsankalpa of the Holy Master Sivananda, brought him down to this earth plane for the spiritual elevation of humanity. Swamiji descended from the rarefied Himalayan heights in obedience to the command of God and met Gurudev in December, 1958. Gurudev was exceedingly happy to see him glowing with a rare divine refulgence. He wished that such a radiant soul should go forth as his ambassador to illumine the seekers of the Western world. Swamiji, however, was pining to go to Uttarakashi to merge in inward contemplation once again. But in response to the pressing requests of the devotees from America, the Holy Master asked Swamiji to proceed to the New World carrying for the people there the message of Yoga and Vedanta. And, so, in obedience to the wishes of his Master he moved from the tranquil, serene Himalayan

abode towards the seething, restless, metropolitan cities in America. Swamiji's travels in the Western hemisphere now extended from central Europe to England, North America and South America. Wherever he went his visit was heralded as a very unique and blessed event. From November, 1959 to December, 1961 he toured the Western hemisphere and left a profound impact in the minds of his inquisitive listeners. He was hailed by the Americans as the most exalted yogi to go there from India, one highly endowed with intellectual and spiritual attainments, and one who could effect a truly profound transformation of the occidental mind. He carried the message of Divine Life to numberless homes, institutions and cities he visited, strenuously maintaining the habits of an Indian Sannyasin all through. Having achieved what may be described as a spiritual conquest of numerous places in the materialistic West he returned to India in triumph in January, 1962, and forthwith rushed to offer his homage to the Holy Master.

Temporary Return into Anonymity: Ajnata Sanchara

For about two years or more Swamiji had to live and move in the busy atmosphere of the Western world, in the midst of Rajasic dynamism in its full blown form. In his own words, "Moving amidst crowds and talking and talking, amidst sound and hurry, I came with a craving for quiet here". Soon after his return from the New World of America he heard the shrill voice from within the call of the woods and forest, the craving for inner silence and rest. He, therefore. fervently requested the Holy Master to permit him to live the life of a lonely Parivrajaka, away from the Ashram life. He only craved for total seclusion: he simply wanted to throw himself into anonymity while being immersed in God in some unknown place. It was not a very easy thing for the Holy Master to give his consent. But so deep was Swamiji's appeal and so strong was his present passion for the life of an Avadhut that Gurudev did not wish to decline, although he did not like

to permit his dear disciple to take to the trying life of a holy vagrant so soon after a hectic and tiring tour of two long years in the West.

He left the Ashram in April 1962 for a pilgrimage to the South for the purpose which he himself described as a cleansing from whatever effect the Westernised atmosphere might have had on the subtle mind. He was, of course, absolutely pure and stainless. But, as he used to emphasise earlier, there are no limits to inner purification. After a long period of sojourn in the West, under its predominantly materialistic atmosphere he voluntarily underwent this period of penance to clean his mind of whatever speck of Rajas, unknown to him, might have descended upon it. By way of observing a higher propriety and vigilance against complacency of the mind, he courted the life of hardship, testing himself still further in the fire of Tapas. Here he emerged, in the words of Swami Krishnananda "as a noble scion in the hierarchy of the ideal Sannyasins of the sacred Bharata Varsha".

Swamiji had decided to be away from everybody, wandering from shrines to secluded places incognito, without anyone's knowledge. But just at that time Dr. B.G. Adhvaryoo made a pressing request that Swamiji be pleased to deliver a series of lectures on Bhagvad Gita arranged by him at the Rajkot Branch of the Divine Life Society. Swamiji had never rejected a request of this noble soul. He showed the letter of request to Gurudev, who in his turn pressed him not to disappoint Dr. Adhvaryoo. Under these circumstances, instead of immediately leaping into the Ajnata Sanchara as he had planned, he proceeded to Gujarat. During his three weeks' stay in Gujarat he delivered a series of discourses at Rajkot and Virnagar. From Virnagar he proceeded to Bombay to fulfil an old promise. While he was in California he had given word to an ardent devotee of Bombay to visit him once. In pursuance of that old promise he stayed with the devotee for a couple of days.

Thereafter, from the Gateway of India he came out as a lonely pilgrim—he was now just a wandering monk without any identity whatsoever. No one in the Ashram knew where he went. No devotee in the country had any information about his whereabouts. He roamed unfettered, undisturbed on the sacred soil of India, beaming with celestial joy, and all the while immersed in divine consciousness. Being contented with whatever he got as his daily alms he lived a life of utmost simplicity and voluntary hardship and remained established in a state of inward bliss, whether he was moving or resting. His Ajnata Sanchara would have perhaps remained absolutely unknown but for the grace of Swamiji himself. He was gracious enough to briefly reveal to the author the major part of his itinerary when pressed with the humble petition that a knowledge of it would be useful to all such aspirants who thirst for the life of a parivrajaka. It would not be possible, of course, to know or describe in details all about Swamiji's experience during that fateful year. Only a broad, general picture can be drawn.

Swamiji first of all spent some days in the state of Maharashtra and then proceeded to Bangalore. In the state of Karnataka he visited several holy shrines and offered his prayers to the Almighty manifesting in those sanctified sites as Archavatara. Moving through Mysore and Mercara he paid homage to the Divine Mother Chamundesvari and then reached Puttur, the birthplace of his beloved Guru Bhai, Swami Krishnananda. Then he proceeded to Mangalore, his own birth place, perhaps to pay homage to the hallowed memory of mother Sarojini. From there he moved to the great Vishnu Kshetra Udipi, the birth place of Madhvacharya, profounder of the Dvaita school of Vedanta philosophy. Udipi is also celebrated as the birthplace of Purandhara Dasa who founded the famous Dasaparampara in which the individual soul is regarded as the eternal servant of the

Lord. Offering his prayers to Lord Krishna and remembering the holy deeds of Madhvacharya and Bhakta Purandhara, he had a blissful experience here. From Udipi he proceeded to the celebrated Devikshetra Kollur where Divine Mother Lakshmi is worshipped as Mukambika Devi, the blessed mother Annapurnesvari famed as fulfilling the desires of even the dumb (Muka) devotees and as such known as Muka Ambika. Here Swamiji stayed a while to offer his prayers for the prosperity and upliftment of all the poor, the sick and the forlorn among mankind and then travelled to Kanhangad. Here at Anandashram he offered his reverent salutations at the holy feet of beloved Papa, His Holiness Sri Swami Ramdas, whose book "In quest of God" had sown in him the seed of spirituality so early in his life. He also met there the blessed Mother Krishna Bai, the foremost disciple of Revered Papa. From Kanhangad he proceeded to Cannanore and then returned to Udipi once again. Here a Sadhu accidentally identified him and forced him to visit his Ashram. Thence Swamiji moved on to Madras and from there proceeded to Tirupati, the sacred seat of Lord Venkateswara. Having offered his prayers to Lord Tirupati Balaji he journeyed to Arunachalam, the Tapobhumi of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Here Swamiji offered his homage to Bhagavan Ramana at his sacred Samadhi shrine and went into inner silence for some time.

The holy pilgrimage of Swamiji had another significant aspect to it. He never missed any occasion of helping the poor and the sick in course of his Parivrajaka life. Near Tirukoilur, while travelling in a bus he saw an old lady who was destitute and blind. He immediately got down from the bus and enquired about her difficulties. He approached a Roman Catholic priest and some policemen, and ensured for the poor woman the

necessary help before leaving the place[7]. While he was thus engaged in acts of service it would have been difficult for one to think that he was a Parivrajaka Swami from the Himalayas. Such acts of compassion have been one of the most dazzling hallmarks of his personality. Whether he was in the New World of America or engaged in the duties of Sivanandashram or in the far south moving incognito as a lonely pilgrim, he never ignored an opportunity of serving God in the poor and the sick.

To return, to the story of the pilgrimage, Swamiji now visited the famous Subrahmanya Kshetra at Tiruttani in Chittoor district, which is one of the six great religious centres, connected with the worship of Karttikeya. Here, in the background of the lovely hills he offered his prayers to Lord Karttikeya and then travelled to Chidambaram, about a hundred and fifty miles to the south of Madras and seven miles from the coast in the South Arcot district. Having worshipped Lord Nataraja at Chidambaram he visited the rare temple of Varaha Avatar at Srimushnam; then he travelled to Kumbhakonam which is famous for its numerous ancient temples. It is a railway station on the main line of the Southern Railways, located on the banks of the river Cauvery in the Tanjavur district. At Kumbhakonam he worshipped the Lord in the Sarangapani temple, Ramaswami temple and temple of Kumbhesvara. He also visited the famous temple dedicated to Lord Karttikeya called Swaminatha at Swamimalai near Kumbhakonam. Then at Mavoor he was happy to have Darshan of Goddess Kaali in the special private temple built by an ardent Tamilian devotee named R.S. Sharma, on the model of the temple of Bhava Tarini of Dakshineswara,

7 *That such acts of mercy must have been legion in the course of the tour is not in doubt at all. But it is impossible to collect information of those acts for the simple reason that it being an Ajnata Sanchara the incidents would hardly be known to anyone else. This small event, however, could be known only because Sri Raghavendra Rao happened to know it.*

near Kolkata. Then Swamiji proceeded to Vadalur where he sat in prayer and meditation for a long time in the famous shrine of saint Ramalinga Swami[8].

From Vadalur he went to Conjeevaram in Chengalput district. Here he paid homage to Lord Varadaraja and also visited the famous monastery of Sri Sankaracharya. Then, after a short stay at Madras and Coimbatore, he proceeded to the most famous Karttikeya Kshetra located on a majestic hill at Palani and offered his prayers to the Lord known here as Dandapani, who stands alone with Vel or spear in his hands without Saktis. From Palani Swamiji journeyed by bus to Madurai where he worshipped the divine mother Meenakshi Devi. Subsequently he went to Pattamadai, the holy land where Sri Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj had incarnated. Swamiji sat down there with great reverence and paid his homage to the great preceptor in deep meditation. It was his Satsankalpa there that something should be done to perpetuate the memory of Sri Gurudev in his birth place. A time came when his Satsankalpa materialised and today a shrine stands there to commemorate the advent of the world-teacher[9].

From Pattamadai Swamiji proceeded to Tenkasi. Then he went to Kanyakumari of Swami Vivekananda

8 *The great saint of Vadalur passed away in 1874. But till now even in the disembodied state he continues to radiate the light of Divine Grace. His Mahasamadhi took place in a marvellous style. He just entered into a room and to the great surprise of all assembled there, simply disappeared in a mass of light. He had established the Samarasa Sanmarga Sangham.*

9 *When Swamiji succeeded Gurudev as the President of the Divine Life Society he began the tradition of celebrating Sivananda Jayanti at Pattamadai itself. He attends the Jayanti there every year on the 8th September. Inspired by Swamiji's exhortations devotees have started there Swami Sivananda Educational Society in the Swami Sivananda Street. Also, Swami Sivananda Centenary Memorial Charitable Hospital was started in the year 1987.*

fame. Here he spent some time reflecting on the inspiring life and message of Swami Vivekananda. Such is his reverence for Swami Vivekananda that even today, in spite of all his onerous duties, he devotes some of his time, teaching the students of Vivekananda Kendra at Kanyakumari, Delhi and other places, when called upon to do so.

From Kanyakumari Swamiji journeyed to Tiruchendur, another famous Karttikeya Kshetra on the seashore at the far end of the Tirunelvely district. Having paid homage to Lord Skanda at this shrine he proceeded to Rameswaram, one of the four great "Dhams" of Bharatavarsha and offered his worship to Lord Siva. Then he visited Trichy and Tanjore. From there he journeyed to Bangalore and then proceeded to Mantralaya near Raichur to pay his homage to the hallowed memory of His Holiness Sri Raghavendra Swami. At Mantralaya he stayed for about a fortnight. It is said that Raghavendra Swami had declared just before his Mahasamadhi: "From here I will be working for seven hundred years more". Readers might recall that Swamiji's father Srinivasa Raoji had once upon a time left home and spent some time at the sanctified site under the spiritual care of Raghavendra Swami in his astral body. Swamiji was immensely happy here, having his daily dip in the sacred river Tungabhadra and merging in deep contemplation and meditation.

From Mantralaya he journeyed to Pandharpur where Lord Vishnu in the form of Vitthal shines as the premier deity of Maharashtra. Here Swamiji spent three months reading, reflecting on the lives and deeds of great Bhaktas like Nam Dev, Tukaram, Ekanath and Jnanesvara and developing in himself a kind of spiritual empathy with those illustrious saints of yore. Every day he spent some time in praising the Lord through the Abhangas of Tukaram and hymns composed by the other saints.

Having thus wandered extensively in the South, Swamiji now desired to settle down in one place for sometime in serious Sadhana. Therefore, he went to Ganagapur, some miles to the south of Sholapur on the Bombay-Madras line of the Central Railway. The Ganagapur Kshetra proper is some fourteen miles to the south of the railway station. Dattatreya is the presiding deity of this holy place. Narasimha Saraswati, who is venerated as an Avatar of Dattatreya, is known to have blessed this sacred Kshetra with his eternal presence. Swamiji finally decided to settle down in this sacred site and perform intense Tapas and meditation. In the course of his long travel, as he moved around sleeping on the ground and living on alms he was inwardly burning, refulgent in the fire of Tapas. Now he decided to live at Ganagapur as a hermit in a simple thatched cottage and tend that fire of Tapas into an inextinguishable, eternal blaze. For eight long months, from October, 1962 to May, 1963, he lived on ground millet which he got as his daily alms. It is an interesting piece of coincidence that the same Kshetra had been sanctified by another great yogi, who also bore the name of Chidananda[10].

In this holy place Swamiji formally gave himself up to intense, undisturbed, protracted meditation. Day by day his whole being was immersed in the ever-deepening waters of Brahma Vichar. The world of names and forms dissolved away and in a very easy and spontaneous manner he settled down in his Nija Swarupa. It was perhaps the most momentous period of his life. He did not have any definite means of sustenance; he was without shelter (Aniketa). Only a simple and bare saffron cloth was hanging on his body. Whatever was voluntarily offered to him was his means of subsistence. The physical body was, as it were, nothing to him, and he lived all the while in his highest consciousness, alone. If

10 *Yogi Chidananda, predecessor of Swami Chidananda at Ganagapur, had spent a long time in that place and had at last taken his Samadhi in the river Bhima.*

he survived with his physical frame intact, it was entirely a matter of cosmic plan. He had gone through the highest self-denial and total self-effacement. Nothing else remained for him to do. Now it was up to the Almighty alone to materialise whatever plans He had in regard to him.

Suddenly he fell ill in May, 1963. By the divine plan he was forced to be keenly conscious of his physical self at the very moment when he was out to completely shrivel it in the flames of Tapas. From the serene atmosphere of Ganagapur he was now hurtled forth by the mysterious hands of the Lord to Bombay. Here he met his senior Gurubhai Sri Swami Paramanandaji. He was given there the necessary medical treatment and persuaded by the doctors to desist from further hardship of pilgrimage. But Swamiji had no other desire. He left Bombay after a brief period of treatment and straight-away proceeded in the northern direction to the hill station of Dehra Dun enroute the Himalayan shrine of Kedarnath. On the way he made a brief halt at Mathura and Brindavan in order to offer his prayers to the Divine Flute Bearer. Side-tracking Rishikesh he proceeded to Dehra Dun and hurried up to the village Barlowganj near Mussorie, a cool place, about 5000 feet up on the hills. Here three days passed. While he was resting, preparing himself for the final lap of his journey into some untrekked region higher up in the Himalayas, he experienced a mysterious, inexplicable pull from his Holy Master. The desire to meet his Holy Master just for once, before he retired for good into some secluded nook in the Himalayas, took possession of him. In his own words, "Suddenly on the fourth day an irresistible desire to see the Master just once, literally pulled me to the Ashram; I came." This was to be of crucial significance to the Divine Life Society.

Last Days With Sri Gurudev

The period of penance and Ajnata Sanchara came to an abrupt end. On 21st June, 1963 Swamiji came back to the Ashram. Gurudev was then preparing for his Mahasamadhi. He had pointedly drawn the attention of his disciples to the date, 14th July, and underlined it on the calendar though without making any specific announcements. He had told them, apparently in a mood of humour, that a Vimana was descending from Vaikuntha to carry him up. Except for him none could foresee that the day of disappearance was to come so soon. He was, however, preparing to go and so his successor had to be pulled back to the Ashram well ahead of the momentous day. This was the Providential plan which forced Swami Chidananda to retrace his steps from Barlowganj.

During the period when Swamiji was away from the Ashram, buried in his inner shell some hundreds of miles away, Kaviyogi Suddhananda Bharati, founder of Yoga Samaj, Madras, happened to visit the Ashram. In course of his conversation with Gurudev, who was his boyhood friend, he asked "Swamiji, please tell me the immortal legacy that you should bequeath to humanity besides your books and buildings. Is it the Divine Life Society? Or is it the holy assembly of Sannyasins you have trained?" Sivananda was indrawn and silent for a moment and then said, "Chidananda, of course. He is the living legacy I leave behind to carry on after me the mission of Divine Life." And then, as if he had already visualised the cosmic plan, he further added, "He is coming soon." On several occasions he had thrown hints that Chidananda was his successor. During the time of the Parliament of Religions at the Ashram in 1953 he gave such an indication to Sri N. C. Ghosh of Kolkata. On another occasion, similarly, while the Master was doing office work in the Diamond Jubilee Hall—so we are told by Swami Vimalananda—Sri Jayadayal Goyendka, the well-known founder of Gita Press, Gorakhpur, met him

and enquired about Gurudev's choice of his spiritual successor. Instead of replying to his question, Gurudev immediately sent word for Chidanandaji to come there. Swamiji came and with reverence, prostrated thrice before the Master from a distance and then prostrated to Goyendkaji too. Nothing more happened. Nothing was said. But the simple ceremony impressed the revered founder of Gita Press very deeply; Chidanandaji's simple presence and humble prostrations filled him with an extraordinary Bhav. He had his answer.

This chosen successor had to come back to the Ashram in the right time. He reached there on 21st June and on enquiry he learnt that Gurudev was slightly unwell and was having rest; so he quietly went back to his Kutir. Early in the morning next day he met Gurudev in his own Kutir on Ganga bank.

The relation between the Holy Master and his chosen disciple was of a unique kind. Swamiji never sat by the side of his Brahmanistha Guru to hear the Srutis. The Master's casual words were in themselves Brahmasutras for this dedicated disciple. He was neither the Master's constant companion nor his Private Secretary. Deepest reverence and utter humility prevented him from speaking any more than was absolutely necessary to the Master. He always maintained a reverential distance. And even when he talked to him he would utter only a few essential words. Even while occupying the high office of the General Secretary of the Divine Life Society when numerous occasions were available to him for holding personal conversation with the Master, Swamiji was proverbially hesitant and humble. Even though in possession of the highest Advaita Sthiti he followed the scriptural injunction and always remained at a reasonable distance from the Master. The Master knew that his chosen disciple was shining by his own right, always established in divine consciousness and that he had no necessity to be by his side.

Two in One

Worshipping the Holy Master at the Samadhi Shrine

But now that the time had come, the Master drew his successor to himself and infused into him the great force of his spiritual power. This is what is known as the mysterious Sakti Sanchara. The communion was over. Sivananda now resided in Chidananda. Two had become one. Sivananda was now Chidananda and Chidananda was Sivananda Swarup.

As far as he was concerned, now that his last desire of seeing the Master was fulfilled, Swamiji was keen to go into final isolation in the height of Kedarnath. He expressed his wish to the Holy Master and sought his blessings. Gurudev only blessed: perhaps he had nothing to say at this juncture except for quietly observing the working of God's Will.

After the interview Swamiji came out of Gurudev's Kutir in an indrawn state of mind. He was preparing for his final departure from the Ashram the same day. Suddenly on that day there was a heavy rain fall, forcing him to remain in the Ashram yet another day. On the next day Swami Krishnanandaji met him and requested him to solve a problem concerning the legal take-over of certain quarters from a person who was unwilling to part with it. As the General Secretary, Swamiji had to first of all solve it. He immediately took the help of officers in charge of law and order, making it clear to the others that institutionally even a Sadhu had to be correct and regular with the secular state. The problem over, now it appeared as though there was no other obstacle for him. He prepared to go. While he was still inside his room he heard somebody knocking on the door, chanting Om Namo Narayanaya. He opened the door and found an old familiar monk, who had gone there with the hope of receiving some treatment for his sickness from Dr. Devaki Kutty. Swamiji took him immediately to Kutty Mataji's room. As she was having her supper he quietly waited outside with the sick monk. When Dr. Kutty came out she was surprised to see Swamiji standing on the verandah. Swamiji referred the Sadhu to her care and

turned to go. But she requested Swamiji to wait for some time till she examined the patient and gave him the necessary medicines. That over, Swamiji was rising to go to his Kutir to make the final preparations to leave the Ashram. At this moment several senior devotees and Gurubandhus of the Ashram came there and literally carried him off. They prevailed over him to join the evening Satsang and sing his soulful Bhajan and give his inspiring discourse which they had not heard for more than a year. Swamiji could not simply shake them off; therefore, he proceeded to the Bhajan Hall.

The Satsang was charged with a new vibration as Swamiji sang his melodious Bhajans that evening. Later, while he was giving his discourse he saw some Sadhak approaching Dr. Devaki Kutty and whispering something into her ear and Dr. Kutty suddenly getting up with a worried expression on her face. When his discourse was over, he found Kutty Mataji standing before him with folded hands and uttering in deep grief: "Swamiji! You cannot go. Gurudev has had a stroke." The words petrified Swamiji; he was too shocked to say anything. The indrawn Swamiji who had no other desire than to contemplate the Self in perfect isolation, who had decided to leave the Ashram forever and lead the life of an anchorite in some unknown Himalayan spot, immediately responded as a true disciple. Nobody had to ask him to change his plans. He decided to stay on and to be of service to his Master. At the moment he had only one duty, that of being available to his Gurudev. With simple firmness and complete self-denial he brushed aside his longings for the life of an isolated hermit in some Himalayan cave and at once took the old duties of a young Brahmachari. As ever, the immediate duty constituted the highest form of prayer and Sadhana. Later, may be, he would stick to his original plans. But for the moment the task was clear. In Swamiji's own words: "The day I was to return occurred the fatal illness of the Master. I could not leave him on the sickbed. So I

cancelled my departure and stayed on, certain that I would be able to go when he recovered and got well. The rest you know! Instead, He decided to go and just when medical people were thinking he was getting better, on the road to recovery, within twenty-four hours his condition changed and the end came".

It was a matter of deep satisfaction to the Master that while he passed away into the Unknown, his worthy son was there by his side. Two days before his Mahasamadhi, Gurudev one evening said to Dr. Kutty pointing his finger at Chidanandaji: "Senior-most disciple". He repeated this twice. He had indicated even in the forties that Raoji was his successor. On the eve of the Mahasamadhi he only confirmed his earlier conviction by repeatedly referring to Chidanandaji as his seniormost disciple. When the final moment of departure of the Holy Master was approaching the worthy successor was found repeating the Mahavakyas of the Upanishads by his side with all solemnity. At last when the end came in the midnight of the 14th July, 1963, he came out of the Master's Kutir and said to the assembled inmates: **It was a beautiful life and it made many lives beautiful.**

The World Teacher had fulfilled his mission and merged himself in the Absolute. Chidananda being the eldest among the children left by the Master, chanted the Names of the Lord at the time of Maha Samadhi. Two days later at one o' clock in the afternoon on the 16th of July, 1963, Sri Gurudev's sacred physical frame was interred with all solemnity and sadness in the holy Samadhi Shrine. Thereafter, the sixteen days' Samadhi rites were performed under Chidanandaji's personal care. During the sickness and, later, after the Mahasamadhi of the Master it was for Chidananda to look after all the important arrangements. Shedding not a drop of tear but wearing a profoundly solemn and indrawn look he went about doing all necessary work and consoling the bereaved family of devotees in the

Ashram; for the rest he was always silent, calm and thoughtful.

There was an apparent vacuous interregnum from the 14th July, 1963 to the 18th August, 1963. The Shodasi Puja being over, the trustees of the Divine Life Society assembled to elect the President. Swami Chidanandaji was then keeping away from all, deeply immersed in silent reflections. The members of Board of Trustees of the Society wished that the reluctant Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj should take the Master's place; in the name of the Master he was literally pushed into it. As modest and untheatrical as ever, he then commented, "A burden has been taken up. It has to be carried". He was formally elected as the President of the Divine Life Society on the 18th August, 1963. At the moment of taking up the responsibility he made a fervent, childlike prayer to the Master: "My only prayer to Gurudev's spirit is that I may be enabled to serve sincerely, work dutifully and live worthily. May he not withhold from this servant the grace of humility nor the talents of selflessness and dedication."

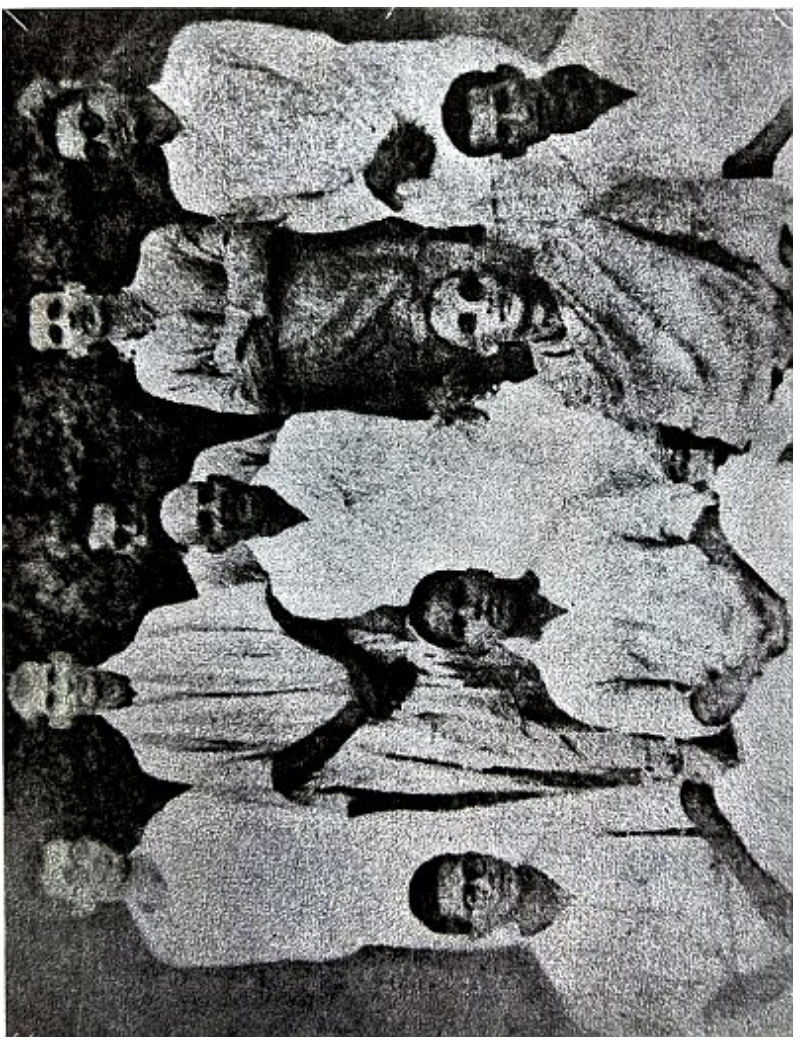
The two decades from 1943 to 1963 are indeed the most momentous in the history of the Divine Life Society. On the bank of the holy Ganga, divinity revealed its grandeur in a twofold form—as dynamic Guru and dedicated disciple. In this holy land of Bharatavarsha countless times Divinity manifests itself in the form of Sadguru. Only dedicated and worthy disciples have been rare. Swami Chidananda is one of these rarest flowers who came with fragrance stored within to bloom and sweeten the world at the mere touch of the Master's rays. No wonder that such a disciplined and dedicated soul emerged as the Holy Master, Sadguru, a true friend, philosopher and guide leading aspirants all over the world in their highway of life. Gurudev did not divulge any special secrets to him. The only secret that Swamiji learnt from the life of the Master was: "Empty thyself and I shall fill thee." Swami Chidananda is, indeed, the

personification of Saranagati and Guru Bhakti, who, inseparable from his Holy Master, continues to teach the great lesson to humanity: "God is Supreme Param Guru, the Viswa Satguru. This world is God in visible manifestation. Hence the world is Guru and life is discipleship. Therefore, you must live life to serve world and learn wisdom from world. This is the Dharma that leads to Moksha".

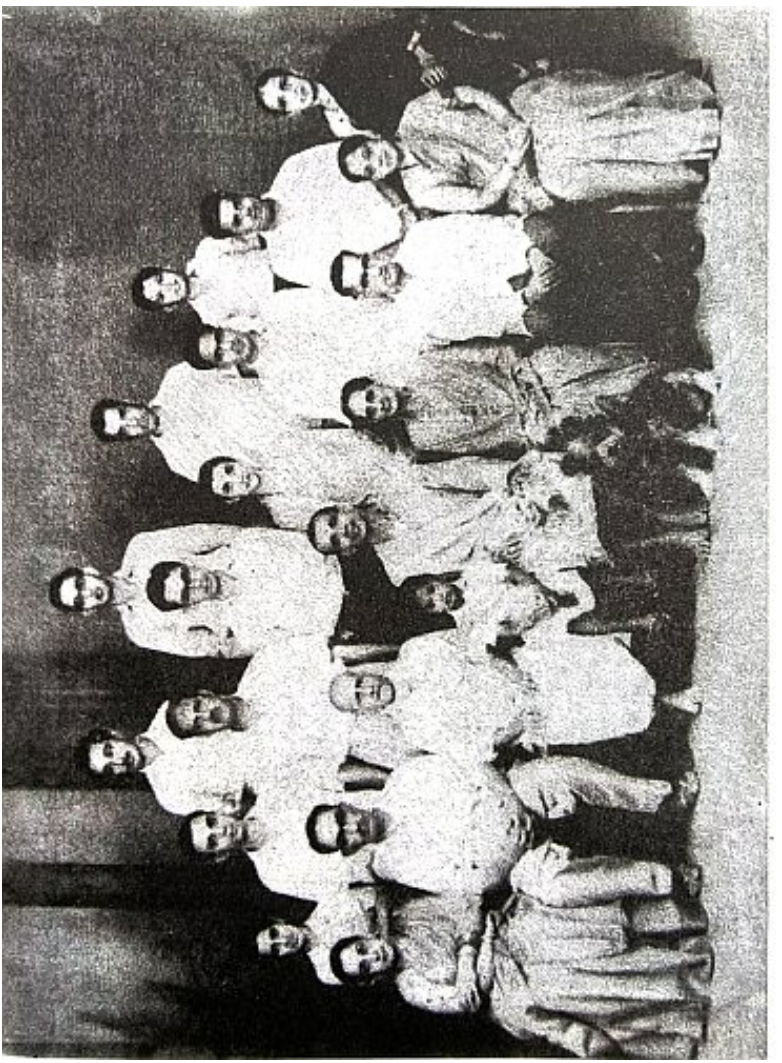
EPOCHAL TOUR WITH THE MASTER

By providential arrangement, then, this monk of India who was keen to be a world renouncer became the most dynamic itinerant preacher carrying Dharma from door to door. But it was not for the first time after 1963 that with the Master's mantle on his shoulders he had to tour abroad conveying the holy message to all humanity. Since 1949 he has been incessantly active as an ambassador of Gurudev through this great country and outside. If a date has to be specified to mark the beginning of this role, one has to go back to 1949 when he was asked by Gurudev to proceed to Patna to deputise on his behalf at the inaugural function of the Bihar Provincial Branch of the Divine Life Society. His compassionate look, the bewitching smile he wore, his kind words, the magnetic aura around his face, and his fiery speech thrilled the audience of Bihar who discovered in him a saint of the first magnitude and spontaneously bowed down before this rising spiritual luminary. So instantaneous and powerful was his impact there that on his return to the Ashram Gurudev himself congratulated him. The Master had tested and discovered the genius of this most distinguished and most humble disciple for purposes of Loka Sangraha.

Gurudev for himself did not welcome any tours. He had kept himself confined to Ananda Kutir, for the most part for long fourteen years or more. His numerous devotees again and again beseeched him for an All-India Tour. But Gurudev kept postponing a decision. Finally, in 1950, he made up his mind to break his isolation and move out to meet the children of the Lord in the four corners of Bharatavarsha. Thus when he came out of Ananda Kutir on the 9th September, 1950, he chose Chidananda as the keystone for his epochal programme.



In the All India Tour with the Master: To the left Of Gurudev (standing)



With Purvashram Relatives

Other stalwarts like Swamis Paramananda and Venkatesananda were the organisational architects of this tour and they served with distinction. But it was Chidananda, who functioned as a veritable replica of the Master throughout the spiritual Yatra. Since then several times he has toured throughout the length and breadth of Bharatavarsha carrying the message of Divine Life to every nook and corner of this Punya Bhumi. But the All-India Tour of 1950 in the company and service of the Holy Master was truly the most memorable of all. Along with Gurudev he appeared before countless devotees of the country not merely as the Deputy of the Master but, by his own rights, as a spiritual personality of a very high magnitude. He was called upon to supplement the speeches of the Master by expounding Vedantic truths in his simple, but soul-stirring discourses, and to inspire the masses for Yogic practices by giving personal demonstration. It was his first prolonged encounter with big audiences, but with his Guru by his side he felt not a moment's uneasiness, irrespective of the quality and magnitude of the crowd. He sparkled before them as the precious Kohinoor of the Sivananda Mission and allured thousands of mortals to the portals of spiritual life. Full of unfathomable Guru Bhakti and intuitive wisdom, he left an indelible impression on the minds of the people wherever he went. In this epochal tour revered Swami Paramanandaji was the redoubtable planner and undisputed leader. Swami Venkatesananda was Gurudev's right-hand person, his physical support and faithful reporter. In addition he was an unequalled expert steno-typist. Swami Narayanananda and Swami Poornabodhananda were totally reliable treasurers and cashiers assisting revered Swami Paramanandaji Maharaj. Swami Sasvatananda was practically a shadow or body-guard of the Master. Swami Govindananda and Swami Purushottamananda worked untiringly to ensure the utmost care for the physical comforts of Gurudev. Swami Omkarananda was

in-charge of distributing spiritual literature. Swami Satyananda addressed Hindi-speaking audience and assisted Swami Dayananda in the sale of Sivananda literature. Padmanabhan (Swami Saradananda) immortalised the tour by his competent service as a photographer and a movie maker. A few others also assisted in more than one way. But Swami Chidananda ranked as a class by himself during this epochal tour. Such was his unique impact that the Master himself pointed at this holy man of God to the people again and again and exhorted them to take him as their highest ideal. Chidananda remains till today the greatest living example of all the ideals preached by Gurudev.

Gurudev had carried with him the sacred water of the holy Ganga from Gangotri to bathe Lord Siva in His blessed shrine at Ramesvaram in the far South. While addressing the seekers at Fyzabad Swami Chidananda made a reference to it and brought forth its inner spiritual import and commented that externally the Holy Master was carrying the Ganga Jal from the sources of the Ganga to offer it to Ramesvara; but by this symbolically he was taking the waters of Jnana Ganga from the very source, his own Atma Jnana, to flood the entire country. Thus, the Teertha Yatra of Gurudev, was, indeed, the highest spiritual service to the people of Bharatavarsha and Sri Lanka.

Gurudev and Swamiji both were identical in their vision, emphasising the urgent necessity of conveying to the students the ancient spiritual lore of this great nation, and throughout the tour both served the students with their illuminating discourses even at the cost of other programmes. At Fyzabad Swamiji delivered an introductory talk before the Master spoke. Here his illuminating address to the students in Hindi on building noble character, practice of Brahmacharya and cultivation of a proper pride in being the fortunate citizens of this Punya Bhumi elicited a tremendous response and the then Commissioner of Lucknow and

Fyzabad Division Mr. S.L. Dhar I.C.S. who presided over the meeting was exuberant in his praise of the electrifying impact the young Sannyasin made on the people. At the famous Hindu University of Varanasi, Swamiji similarly inspired the student-community to imbibe the ancient Indian ideals. The thought-provoking nature of the discourse stirred even the senior Professors.

It was at Patna that India discovered Swamiji as the prospective heir of the Holy Master and as a towering sage of deep wisdom. Here the Master addressed the local Rotary Club on "Universal Brotherhood". At the end of the lecture there was the usual question hour. It so happened that on that occasion Gurudev directed Swamiji to answer the questions of the Rotarians on his behalf. He indicated thereby his complete identity, as it were, with Swamiji. The occasion revealed to the seekers that Swami Chidananda was the pure prism reflecting the thoughts of Gurudev to illumine the path of thirsting aspirants. One after another half a dozen members of the club rose to present Swamiji with very knotty philosophical and ethical problems covering a variety of topics. Swamiji answered them in so thoroughgoing a manner that one would suspect that he had gone there prepared to answer those very questions.[11] The truth flashed on the audience that without access into the high spiritual realms it would not have been possible on the part of this young Sannyasin to pour out immediately, on the spur of the moment, so wise and logical spiritual explanations before a select group of highly educated persons which included eminent people like Sri Kamala Kanta Verma, ex-Chief Justice of Allahabad High Court and others. His answers had a special beauty of their own, displaying the authority of the scriptures, the insight of a gifted mind, and analytical presentation and

11 *A detailed account of the questions of the seekers and the explanatory notes of Swamiji has been given by Swami Venkatesananda in "Sivanandas Lectures—All-India Tour."*

intimate observations from day to day life. At the end of the session the seekers expressed their great appreciation of Swamiji's alertness, understanding and persuasive power. The response can perhaps be summed up by quoting only the comment of Sri A.K. Sinha, Inspector General of Police. He advanced upto Chidanandaji at the end of the meeting and exclaimed, "Swamiji! I feel proud of you". This young unknown Sannyasin in his thirties thus won the love and admiration of a host of mature and sophisticated persons not easily given to excitements of hero worship.

Often during the tour Swamiji initiated the programmes with his enchanting "Jai Ganesh Kirtan." If there was a Hindi-speaking audience he would come forward to explain in Hindi the purport of Gurudev's English speech, and steal the heart of the audience as at Ganga Mahal, Gaya and many other places. As has already been indicated, Gurudev himself was so much impressed by Swamiji's uncommon humility, selfless service of all living creatures and unbroken divine consciousness that he was ever eloquent in referring to the spiritual qualities of his dedicated disciple wherever he went. While addressing the International Fellowship in the Government House at Madras he cited the example of Swami Chidanandaji as a matchless Karma Yogi whose Seva with Narayana Bhava was an ideal to be emulated by Sadhaks who were even far older than him. He referred to the incident of Chidananda's treatment of a sick dog. Its infected body gave out a terrible stench and it was constantly on the move, driven away by people from one place to another. Swamiji found it near the footsteps of the Ashram and dressed it carefully for several weeks with his own hands. In the same strain the Master referred to the case of a Punjabi Sadhu suffering from terrible leprosy beside whom one would not even stand for a minute. But Chidanandaji dressed his leprous hands and feet with his own hands and miraculously healed him by his holy touch. After

showering his praises on Swamiji for his exemplary Seva the Master then threw a question at the audience: "Is there anyone among you who has done such service even once in life?" In Gurudev's estimate Swamiji was unsurpassed in the highest kind of selfless service, which was done with such complete devotion and faith that it was worship of Lord Narayana.

Wherever the Master addressed the students in schools, colleges and Universities, Swamiji was ever ready to come forward to demonstrate Yogic exercises. Sometimes he offered running commentaries on the Yogasana film shows. At the Annamalai University Gurudev's lecture programme was followed by a film show on Surya Namaskar, Asanas, Pranayama and other Yogic Kriyas. The movie show was made wonderfully lively and instructive by the superb commentary of Swamiji. With the authority of his own personal experience he explained to the young men the benefits accruing from Yogasanas. The commentary created such tremendous enthusiasm that literally hundreds of students came forward to learn the Yogic exercises.

When the party reached Chidambaram, the Holy Master felt unwell. He could not attend the public meeting and deputed Swamiji to address the gathering instead. Kavi Yogi Suddhananda Bharati, an old classmate of Gurudev, also joined Swamiji. Swamiji reached the venue of the meeting and poured forth his shower of spiritual instruction and soulful Kirtan. The audience was thrilled and had no sense of disappointment in missing the lecture of the Master.

On the 8th October the Yatra Mandali reached Trichy. In the local National College Swamiji addressed the teachers and students and brought home to them in a very simple and appealing manner the fundamental truth of how we are all offshoots of the same Divinity. He laid stress on the practical aspect of Self-realisation and held that an ounce of practice was better than tons of

theory. He summed up Gurudev's teaching in the famous song of Upadesamrit:—

Serve, love, give, purify, meditate, realise.
Be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate.
Practise Ahimsa, Satyam, Brahmacharya.
This is the essence of Yoga and Vedanta.
Enquire 'Who am I', know thy Self and be free.
You are not this body, not this mind, Immortal Self you are.
Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare.

In the course of the tour sometimes Swamiji had to play the role of the Master. On every occasion he performed it to the utmost satisfaction of the organisers and the devotees. For instance, Swami Sankarananda, President, Sivananda Sadhana Nilayam, Tiruengoimalai, had requested the Master to visit the Ashram and bless the inmates. But it was not possible for Gurudev to proceed to Tiruengoimalai. At the same time he did not want to disappoint the inmates of the Ashram. Therefore, he deputed Swamiji as his personal representative to this model Ashram. He was confident that his message would be effectively conveyed to Sivananda Sadhana Nilayam through his able agent. In accordance with the direction of the Master Swamiji proceeded to the place and on his arrival there spoke upon how Sadhana Nilayam was the outcome of Gurudev's direct inspiration and forceful suggestion to Swami Advayananda and of the vital need and unique value of such spiritual centres and of the wonderful spiritual revolution that the Holy Master aimed to bring about through such institutions. With utmost humility he told the audience there that he was only the Nimitta of his beloved Gurudev. With this noble Bhav he laid the foundation stone of the proposed school building at the Nilayam with a silver trowel. Swami Sankarananda, President of the Nilayam, later conveyed his feeling that the holy presence and inspiring discourse of Swamiji produced the same spiritual vibrations which they expected to have with Gurudev's presence.

When the Yatra Mandali reached Rameswaram, Gurudev carried the sacred Ganga Jal himself and offered it as Abhishek to Lord Siva while Swamiji chanted hymns and sang thrilling Bhajans in praise of the Lord.

Then the party crossed the sea and reached the island of Ceylon. The Master addressed a big public meeting at Colombo. The meeting was followed by a film show on Yogic exercises. Here again Swamiji came forward to give a running commentary on the benefits of the Asanas. He compared the Western physical exercises with Indian Yogasana system and proved the superior excellence of the Yogasanas. He described how astonishingly the Asanas influence the endocrine system of glands, the ductless glands. He further pointed out that the malfunctioning of the thyroid, pituitary and pineal glands is corrected by a course of select Yogasanas.

During the return journey at Trivandrum there was a morning Satsang. In the presence of Gurudev himself Swamiji conducted the course. The participants felt powerfully drawn and attuned to a higher meditative mood. At the end of the meditation Swamiji threw light on the secret of this inner Sadhana. In his illuminating discourse he asked the Sadhaks to adopt the following formula for success in meditation:—

See but look not.
Hear but listen not.
Touch but feel not.
Taste but relish not.

Through this practice, Swamiji added, the Sadhak does not get attached to worldly objects and gradually he is enabled to develop the Sakshi Bhav. Once the Sadhak acquires the awareness of the witness he is established in his very Self and dwells in his Nija Swarupa. In this way the aspirant gains success in his practice of meditation. Gurudev was very much pleased to hear the

illuminating discourse and praised Swamiji for his neat and effective exposition.

Thus throughout the All-India Tour, unmindful of his delicate health, in total disregard of the extraordinary strain imposed on his body, Swamiji came forward promptly on every occasion to do the bidding of the Master, addressing the surging crowds, singing enchanting Kirtans, demonstrating Yogasanas, explaining their benefits and dispelling the doubts of the seekers. On every occasion he left behind a powerful impact on his listeners. His discourses on meditation, in particular, had an electrifying influence on the audiences filling them with wonderful spiritual vibrations.

Swamiji's contribution to the success of the epochal All-India Tour was, indeed, of a high order. As a very humble instrument he linked himself to his Holy Master and exerted a preponderating influence on men's minds. His critical faculty, intuitive wisdom and above all, his incomparable purity and humility, led even a vast number of young college students to shed their false vanity and take to the study of Gita, practice of Yogic exercises and dedication to serve humanity and seek Divinity.

In this epochal tour the Holy Master loomed like a spiritual titan and thundered forth his Vedantic injunctions to awaken the people from their inertness. His presence itself was overpowering. Before such a spiritual giant any body else would have paled into insignificance. But such was the inner spiritual wealth of the dedicated disciple that with his remarkable humility, exemplary Guru Bhakti, magnetic personality, and intuitive wisdom he carved out a special place in the hearts of one and all. That in the presence of Gurudev he could evoke so much admiration is by itself the greatest proof of the supreme spiritual dimension he had already achieved by that time.

Chidananda did this service to the people of Bharatavarsha, as he continues to do even today, as an act of Guru Seva. He behaved like an instrument of the Holy Master in the dissemination of spiritual knowledge. The people at many places showed as much love and reverence to him as they had towards Gurudev himself. But he was not the least tainted by the honour and praises showered on him. As in 1950, so also a generation after it he still continues to serve the people of Bharatavarsha only as the servant of the Holy Master. He did not claim to have at his command a new gospel of his own. He served the Master's mission and that constituted his greatest satisfaction. What he really cherished for himself was only a protracted period of unbroken silence in the depths of some Himalayan cave. That cherished ideal is reflected in one of his letters written to an intimate friend of the Ashram during this epochal tour. He wrote, "I am somewhat tired of these motor cars, big bungalows, shops and theatres and luxuriously dressed people. I long to wear a torn, soiled Dhoti and walk along the jungle behind the Viswanath Mandir in the Ashram." These few words speak volumes about Swamiji's detachment and dispassion at the contingent hour of name and from. No doubt he toured and moved in the midst of great commotion. But deep within he continued to live in an impregnable world of serene seclusion. Even in days of the busiest programmes he did not miss his hour of meditation. In spite of all this hectic work, all on a sudden, in a flash he could be lost to the outer world. The following words, again, which Swamiji wrote during the tour to an intimate friend reveal his indrawn state and a blissful experience in deep silence. Thus he wrote, "Yesterday we spent two hours on the ship (while proceeding from Dhanushkoti to Ceylon)... The entrancing expanse of the ocean water captured my whole being and held me captive. The peace was absolute. Senses and mind were lulled and one was lifted out of self and thrown

somewhere, where it was all stillness and in the silent joy born of that stillness everything was forgotten".

With this awareness in the innermost core of his being Swamiji accompanied the Holy Master and served him and the blessed citizens of Bharatavarsha and Sri Lanka for their great spiritual awakening. The Holy Master Sivananda carried out the Lord's command and his dedicated disciple Chidananda carried out his Master's command; both knocked at the doors of lay citizens of India to remind them of the call of the Vedas, to remind them that as the blessed scions of seers and sages of this sacred land they had a glorious mission to undertake.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN THE NEW WORLD

Swamiji emerged from the epochal All-India tour of 1950 as a distinguished messenger of the Sanatana Dharma. The Holy Master who had prophesied so often about the future importance of Chidananda to the modern world was happy to find the vindication of that faith. He could see that Swamiji was the fittest person to carry the eternal message of Bharatavarsha to the West. Among his disciples he was the most eminently suitable to convey his gospel of divine life to all corners of the world and be its chief exponent and example.

For himself, however, Swamiji had a very much different programme. He was gradually moving further and further away into a life of seclusion, trying to live all the time in a blissful state of superconsciousness in the solitude of the Himalayas. Thus in the summer of 1958 he proceeded with the Master's permission to Badri Narayan and stayed there for several months in inner silence. The temple was to be closed for winter and so Swamiji came down to the Ashram in December. But he still remained so much indrawn and retiring that Gurudev advised him to proceed to Uttarakashi and requested the Manager of Kalikamaliwala Kshetra to write to the Branch Manager of the organisation at Uttarakashi to provide suitable accommodations to Swamiji. This arrangement was made by Gurudev on the 31st December, 1958. But this was not to materialise. There was a dramatic change in the plans. Swami Radha who had organised the Sivananda Ashram at Vancouver in Canada visited Ananda Kutir in the meanwhile and prayed to Gurudev to ask one of his senior Sannyasi disciples to visit and stay at Vancouver Ashram for a period of three to four months in order to inspire and guide the seekers there. The Holy Master promised her to

make the necessary arrangements and, therefore, revised his plan in respect of Swamiji and decided to send him to Vancouver, for he was the most accomplished and worthy ambassador of Divine Life. He knew that Canada or Uttarakashi should make no difference to Swamiji who had already attained the highest kind of spiritual knowledge and poise. Therefore, he called him to his side and asked him to proceed to Canada to preach the message of Yoga and Vedanta in the Western hemisphere. Swamiji humbly reminded the Master that arrangements had already been made for him to start for Uttarakashi. But Gurudev merely said, "God's work is good." He thus reminded Swamiji that he was born to fulfil a great mission, to elevate humanity in the East and the West. Swamiji bowed down before the Master, murmuring to himself, "O Lord, Thy Will be done." Thus the disinterested Mahatma who had already made up his mind to give himself up to unbroken meditation in seclusion now agreed to embark on an extensive tour of Canada and North American Continent in obedience to the Will of God and Gurudev.

Swami Radha, however, fell seriously ill and could not make the necessary arrangements for his journey and he had to keep on biding his time in the Ashram in accordance with the desires of the Master. Mrs. Victoria Coanda, another devotee of Gurudev from Milwaukee, U.S.A., who also visited the Ashram had heard meanwhile that there was some likelihood of Swamiji's visit to Canada. She voluntarily sent the passage money and beseeched Gurudev to send Swamiji anyhow. So the Master advised Swamiji to accept the invitation of Mrs. Coanda and to proceed to the United States first and then to Canada. This was the providential arrangement by which Swamiji was led to the United States in place of Uttarakashi. With the barest possible minimum of personal articles and with the choicest blessings of Gurudev, Swamiji left the Ashram on 30th October, 1959. On the eve of his departure for the United States of

America, Swamiji addressed a public meeting in New Delhi on 31st October at the Constitution Club Hall. Dealing with Swami Sivananda's message to the West he concluded vibrantly, "O man! Thou art essentially divine. Godliness is inherent in you. You are not of this earth, earthy. You are the spirit full of effulgence of the light of Satchidananda. That is your supreme source, your innermost substance and your glorious ultimate goal."

On 2nd November, 1959, Swamiji left Delhi by Air for America. On the way he broke his journey at Cairo, where he was received by Mahamad Abd Allah el Mehdi of the local branch of the Divine Life Society. At Istanbul, similarly, he was received by Ali Riza Akisan, a journalist. Most of the newspapers at Istanbul gave wide publicity to his visit. Swamiji gave interviews to the Press and also to ADC, the premier newsreel organisation in Turkey. He demonstrated Yogic exercises and delivered his first public lecture of the tour at the Istanbul High School. Here he inspired the students to live ideal lives and to build sound character. Enroute to New York Swamiji halted at Rome, Dusseldorf, Amsterdam and London. When he reached New York, he found Swami Vishnudevananda waiting at the airport for him. Swami Vishnu, brother disciple of Master Sivananda, had started the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta centre in different parts of America, for propagation of Hatha Yoga. Living at the Yoga Vedanta Centre, Cornish Arms Hotel, therefore, Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj delivered a series of three lectures on the subject of Raja Yoga, the concept of Illusion in Hindu Philosophy and Karma and reincarnation on 19th, 20th and 21st respectively. It was an extraordinary experience for the audience, who, while being conveyed on the crests of powerful eloquence and logic felt at the same time a tremendous spiritual force being generated by the venerable Swamiji which in some supra-logical manner took possession of their entire being. It was a thrilling case of `I came, I saw, I was conquered' for each member in the audience.

On the 26th November Swamiji left New York and arrived on the same day by air at Milwaukee (Wisconsin), where he was warmly received by Mr. and Mrs. Coanda. On the arrival of this great Indian Yogi, Milwaukee Daily published the news that the spiritual ambassador of Sivananda had reached the States for propagation of Yoga and Vedanta.

On 2nd December, 1959, Swamiji made his first appearance on a television network in the U.S.A. and spoke over the radio soon after on the gospel of Divine Life. He pointed out that truth, non-violence and purity are the essence of religion and spirituality. They are the essence of Yoga and Vedanta. Selfless service, universal love, charity, purity, devotion and meditation will automatically, unfailingly lead to illumination and Self-realisation. Thus he spoke to the Americans on the gospel of Gurudev Sivananda and impressed them in personal contacts with his deep sincerity, supreme purity and profound humility.

On the 6th December Swamiji addressed the first meeting of the Yoga-Vedanta centre at Milwaukee and drew about one hundred seekers to the practical training of Yoga. He began a short course on 14th December and held daily classes on Suryanamaskar, Yogasanas, Pranayama and meditation. He took up Gurudev's work "Fourteen Lessons on Raja Yoga" as the text book for these classes and expounded the ideas of the book in his characteristically elevating and inimitable style. He also conducted daily meditation classes at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Coanda, at 607, College Avenue. The hosts were filled with indescribable joy at the holy presence of Swamiji. Some of his discourses at Milwaukee were *Yoga for the Christian, Yoga and Self culture, New Life and Practice of Meditation.* At Kiwanis Club and South Milwaukee Public School he lectured on Psychology in Yoga, the Hindu View of Life, Vedic Concepts and Ideals and Important Ideals for the Youth. In all these lectures there was no intellectual jugglery or mystical

abstractions; based and certified by his own personal experience they comprised very practical and homely enunciations and instructions. During his stay at Milwaukee he also paid a visit to the residence of Mrs. Veera Burch, a sister of Mrs. Victoria Coanda, and gave his sermons in two special Satsangs at 3620E, Underwood Avenue, Cudahy, Wisconsin. Dorothy Madle, a journalist and writer nostalgically reminisced later: "This slender monk in traditional saffron robe sat contentedly in the Coandas' living room, answering questions in unassuming manner. Swamiji told that secrecy is no longer necessary in Yoga. Yoga is not a religion but technique for drawing nearer to God." In the middle of January, 1960 Swamiji visited Minneapolis in the neighbouring state Minnesota where he gave five discourses on the spiritual culture of India and its application in the life of modern man. These lecture programmes were arranged by the Young Men's Christian Association and they were very well attended.

At the request of Dr. Judith Tyberg of the East West Culture Centre, Swamiji went to Los Angeles on 7th February, 1960 and stayed there for a month. During this period he exerted an overwhelming spiritual influence over the Americans. His lecture at the East West Cultural Centre, 1162, St. Andrews Place, on What and Why of Yoga created a tremendous stir and spiritual awakening and many men of eminence and learning conceded that Swamiji was an extraordinary spiritual personality. A sincere seeker, Peter Mann, who met Swamiji during this period, wrote, "One look at Swami Chidananda visiting here from India and you realise that he is no ordinary man. It is not his pale orange monkish garb or his close cropped hair that gives this impression. It is not even the case with which he assumes the difficult lotus position. *Undoubtedly it is his eyes, large, dark and lustrous: they reflect a mystic depth."* In his discourses at Los Angeles Swamiji held that Yoga transcends religion and is available to every one who

believes in God. During those days his name was on every body's lips there. On 22nd February the Monday issue of the paper "Los Angeles Examiner" reported eloquently praising Swamiji. It commented on the wonderful impact of Swamiji's elucidations: "As you talk with Swami Chidananda at the East West Cultural Centre he reveals the what and why of Yoga."

Mrs. Meta Thur Olson, who knew Swami Sivananda earlier, was so much impressed by Chidananda that she wrote to Gurudev, "I also want to tell you that Kenneth and I were very favourably impressed by Swami Chidananda. We feel that if you yourself could not come to America at this time you sent the *finest ambassador possible to represent your own good self.* When one looks beneath the outer garb of the man one finds a very saintly soul with many beautiful qualities. He feels so deeply his devotion to the Lord and is so sincere! As I observed him here in our home and also listened to his lecture I realised that *he is a reflection of his beloved Master....* It is indeed a great privilege to know him and I just cannot speak too highly of him.... He does not even know that I am writing to tell you these nice things. He is such a humble and blessed soul, I feel sure, that he could never tell you himself."

During his stay at Los Angeles Swamiji visited the headquarters of Self Realisation Fellowship at Mt. Washington where he was the guest of Sister Daya Mata, President of the Self Realisation Fellowship. Sister Daya happens to be the disciple of Paramahamsa Yogananda, who was very successful in popularising Kriya Yoga in America. She was so deeply impressed by the divine personality of Swamiji, that she felt moved to write to Gurudev Sivananda, "Your faithful chela, Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj, has also visited us and is now staying for a few days in our hermitage in Encinitas. We are deeply pleased to have him with us, for *his humility, simplicity and purity have won our hearts. He brings to us*

too, a fresh inspiring touch of the divine life from the shores of the Ganga in Rishikesh".

For about a month Swamiji conducted Yoga classes and group meditation and delivered lectures on Yoga and Vedanta in Los Angeles. Then he proceeded to San Francisco, where he devoted another month to the propagation of the message of Divine Life. These official programmes apart, Swamiji gave interviews to a large number of people and left an indelible impression on them. One remembers one such personal encounter during his stay in San Francisco, when he visited James Town to give Darshan to mother Paula Corneley, a German lady, who was an ardent devotee and sincere Sadhak. It was an interesting meeting. While mother Paula felt embarrassed and deeply touched by his kindness, Swamiji met her most unassumingly and genially like an old friend and behaved in a very natural and easy style. The impact of this short visit was to be a memorable one from that time. Mother Paula dedicated herself entirely to Seva and Sadhana. She realised that when the field is ready, the seed too is ready and that the Guru will be at one's threshold in the proper time.

On 13th April Swamiji left San Francisco and arrived in Montreal, after a brief visit to Portland. At Montreal he guided the activities of the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre at 2029, Stanley Street, in the absence of Swami Vishnudevananda, the Founder Director of that Centre, who was on a month's visit to India. Here he gave a series of lectures on different aspects of Yoga and Indian Culture. From Montreal he proceeded to Vancouver B.C. on 19th May and was warmly received by Swami Sivananda Radha who had recovered from her illness, and other devotees. Here at Sivanandashram, 6591, Marlborough Avenue in the suburb of South Burnaby he held regular classes on meditation and gave a series of discourses on different branches of Yoga. He taught the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Bhagavad Gita and Upanishad in the light of his experiences. He served the

mission of the Master in this Western part of Canada till the middle of August.

Before the end of August he arrived in Los Angeles. At Hollywood, under the auspices of the East-West Cultural Centre, he gave a series of ten lectures on the principles of Yoga and spiritual values of life. Then he left again for Vancouver for a short rest. By this time Swamiji's fame had spread through the length and breadth of this vast country. He was invited by the American Academy of Asian Studies to come to San Francisco to deliver a series of lectures in the Academy as a Visiting Professor. Therefore, he left Vancouver for San Francisco and spent four months delivering lectures on Vedanta and Indian heritage to the students of the American Academy of Asian Studies. During his four months' stay at San Francisco he had a very useful and long programme of holding classes and giving public lectures. On weekends sometimes he visited James Town as the guest of the great devotee Mother Paula. During such visit to James Town, the residence of Mother Paula Corneley was converted into another Ashram and filled with spiritual vibrations. Here Swamiji devoted his whole time for discourses, Satsangs, group meditation, Yoga Asana classes and interviews clarifying the doubts of a good number of seekers. On two occasions he gave his address in the local Town Hall which was surprisingly packed with large audiences even without much publicity. Spiritual vibrations through contact with a God-realised soul were novel experiences for the seekers who used to flock there and Swamiji endeared himself to them all by his grace and wisdom.

Referring to the Cosmic plan that arranged these Satsangs Swamiji later wrote to Mother Paula, "Had it not been for the force of that desire of the merit of your almost incessant Smaran, how is it that I was compelled to come to James Town again and again every time I was in the West?" The story of mother Paula's devotion to Swamiji is, indeed, a unique and thrilling one. So great

was the impact of Swamiji on her that later, after he left America, she sold all her possessions, relinquished all material happiness, came to Sivananda Ashram, built there the Om Kutir by the side of the Yoga Sadhana Kutir and spent her time in the service of the animals, in meditation and prayer. When her last days came she only wanted that after her death her body should be put into the Ganga personally by Swamiji himself. In mysterious circumstances Swamiji did fulfil her last wish. Thus in the East or in the West he was always deeply concerned about the individual devotees and seekers rather than merely official programmes. From San Francisco Swamiji proceeded to Los Angeles. He then visited Houston (Texas), Milwaukee (Wisconsin) and a few other cities early in 1961, spreading the message of the Holy Master in all these places. Then he went to Montreal, Canada, for a short stay in the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre there. For nearly one year and a half Swamiji taught Yoga and Vedanta in North America. Then he left Montreal in March 1961 and spent a week each, in New York and London. From London he proceeded to Switzerland in the first week of April. In Switzerland he delivered his discourses for a month and also conducted an Easter Spiritual Retreat at Trogen, near St. Gall.

Then he gave public lectures at Zurich, Basel and Bern. From Switzerland Swamiji went to Italy to have Darshan of the saintly Catholic priest, Padre Pio. This Christian Father was a Franciscan monk bearing five stigmata on two hands, two feet and one side of his body. He identified himself with the sufferings of Christ and received the five stigmata on his body. The Father was a pretty old man in his seventies when Swamiji met him. This senior saint showed grace to the young Indian Swami. Swamiji sought his blessings and felt deeply gratified by this brief association. This is how men of God, with their minds and their lives wholly absorbed in God, cherish and enlighten each other. From Italy

Swamiji proceeded to London, then revisited New York where he halted for a few days, and then left for South America at the behest of the Holy Master.

He arrived at Montevideo (Uruguay) on 21 May, 1961 and opened the Montevideo Branch of the Divine Life Society on the 27th July. He stayed here for four months and held regular classes on different aspects of Yoga including group meditation. Dr. Orlando P. Ndal, an ardent devotee of Master Sivananda, was the Chief Organiser of Swamiji's tour in South America. During Swamiji's stay at Montevideo Dr. Mateo J. M. Magarinos, the then Deputy Foreign Minister of Uruguay, felt deeply impressed by Swamiji's spiritual aura and took keen interest in his teachings. On 30th September, 1961, Swamiji's tour programme in Uruguay cconcluded and he was given a moving send-off by the seekers and students of the Centro Sivananda of Montevideo. On an invitation from Alexander Eru and his friends Swamiji proceeded to Argentina for a five-day programme of Yoga classes and spiritual discourses at Buenos Aires.

On the 5th October 1961 he flew back to the United States and landed at Houston (Texas) on the 6th. Here he delivered talks and conducted Satsang for three days. Mr. Barrie Tinkler and Professor Earnest Wood arranged these lecture programmes and played hosts to Swamiji. Then Swamiji proceeded to San Antonia, where he met Dr. Herbert Shelton, the reputed Natural Hygienist. He then moved to California as the guest of Dr. Judy Tyberg of the East West Cultural Centre. Many sincere seekers and old devotees like Mario, Brodine, Tom Danelli, Ina Selin, Pruce, Rev. Raymer, Rev. Gaunt, Gunner Walter flocked at Los Angeles to meet Swamiji and listen to his words of wisdom. Swamiji inspired the seekers in a prayer meeting by his elevating discourse and conducted a meditation class.

From Los Angeles he proceeded to San Francisco on 20th October 1961 and on the next day he went to James

Town again to give Darshan to Mother Paula Corneley and her spiritual group and shower his blessings on the seekers there. It was the insistent prayer of Mother Paula that had led Swamiji to the place. As Swamiji later wrote to her explaining the mysterious manner in which he often answered her unspoken but fervent prayers, "I am by thy side: I dwell within thee as a part of the eternal Antaryamin, the Supreme Indweller with whom I am ever one in spirit." In the open air under the sunny autumn sky he filled the devotees with a meditative mood and blessed them with his prayers. Returning to San Francisco, Swamiji again addressed the devotees of the Divine Life Society there at Metaphysical Town Hall and clarified the doubts of the students and seekers in some personal interviews.

From San Francisco he proceeded to Portland (Oregon State) where he met Sri Swami Aseshanandaji of the Vedanta Society and then moved North to Vancouver. At Vancouver devotees like Swami Sivananda Radha, Bill Eilers, Joe, Hail, Carol, Rev. Preistly, and Fred Black assembled on a Sunday and drank deep from the fountain of wisdom contained in benedictory discourses of Swamiji on 6th November, 1961. Swamiji left Vancouver for Iowa City where he halted as a guest of Dr. R. Holzinger and inspired the devotees in a prayer meeting. From Iowa he proceeded to Minneapolis where he associated himself in two Satsangs. Then he proceeded to Milwaukee on the 10th November and stayed there for fourteen days as the guest of Mr. Joseph and Mrs. Victoria Coanda. Here he met Swami Sivapremananda from Rishikesh Ashram who had then come to Milwaukee. On 23rd November, 1961, he bade good-bye to the devotees of Milwaukee and took leave of them finally and proceeded to New York where he stayed for four days and addressed the students of Yoga Vedanta Centre. On 27th November he left the United States and went across to Montreal where he met Swami

Vishnudevananda. He addressed there two public meetings, on 30th November and 1st December.

Swamiji left the New World on December 1, 1961 and turned homeward. On his way back he halted at Paris and journeyed to the holy shrine of Lourdes, situated at a distance of about 500 miles. At Lourdes there is a miracle spring, visited by cripples in large number to have a dip for cure. The shrine is hallowed by the visitation of mother Mary. There is a statue of Mother Mary to commemorate her sacred visit. Swamiji took a sacred bath in the famous waters and then proceeded to Germany and later on to Switzerland.

On 15th December Swamiji left Zurich and went on a pilgrimage to the holy land of Assisi where St. Francis was born about 1800 years ago. As has been indicated earlier, Swamiji was much inspired by the life of St. Francis right from his childhood and his own life may be fittingly compared to the life of that great Christian saint. In fact, in the West some devout persons regard him as the St. Francis of India. He took it as a holy privilege to pay a visit to the birth place of the great saint and felt highly sanctified in the holy centre. Then he proceeded to San Giovanni Rotondo to pay homage to Padre Pio once again.

Thereafter Swamiji proceeded to the holy land of Jerusalem and Bethlehem[12] where he observed the holy Christmas on the 25th December, 1961, and offered his thanks to the Lord Saviour for the completion of his assignment among His children in the West.

Swamiji's first tour through the Western hemisphere had come to a close. From Jerusalem he proceeded to Cairo and from there he flew to India towards the close of the year 1961. On 30th December he reached Bombay and went for a brief rest for some time to Pudukottai in

12 *Here the compassionate master prayed for the well-being of a young boy whose despairing mother had prayed to him for bringing about some change in her wayward son.*

South India. On 23rd January, 1962, he arrived at the Ashram and proceeded straight to Sri Gurudev's Kutir and offered his homage at the feet of the Holy Master.

The whole itinerary was in the nature of a service of the worshipful Master Swami Sivananda and his divine mission. More than two years ago he had touched the holy feet by way of parting. The mission over, again he returned to the refuge of those holy feet. All that he had achieved, all that he had served, even all that he had effected he now humbly surrendered at those lotus feet.

GLOBAL TOUR

After the Mahasamadhi of Gurudev, Swamiji had to guide the Ashram as the leader of the illustrious band of disciples left behind by the Master. He had to look into the details of management, keep close touch with the numerous branches of the Society spread across continents, attend to the prayers of a great number of individual devotees and at the same time convey the divine message to all corners of the globe. So pressing was the prayer of the devotees from all over the world that in spite of the onerous responsibilities he already bore he had to respond to their call and go abroad to meet their loving demands. It had been enjoined upon him by the Holy Master Sivananda to dedicate the rest of his life to Lokasangraha and Swamiji was quite prepared to undertake this highest spiritual service of humanity at large.

The devotees of Ceylon were the first to succeed in drawing him out of India. They had experienced his celestial touch when he had gone there in the company of the Master in 1950. They had kept pressing upon the Headquarters of the Divine Life Society for another such visit ever since. Fifteen years later they had the wonderful opportunity of welcoming Swamiji into their midst again and hearing his words of wisdom. Devotees of Gurudev in Ceylon still remember that Sunday, the 13th June, 1965, with great nostalgia and reverence, for that was the date when Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj as the President of the Divine Life Society set foot on the soil of Ceylon. On his arrival at Ratmalana airport he was reverentially welcomed by, among others, Swami Satchidananda, V.F. Gunaratne, M. Sivarasa and Swami Sivananda Satchidananda Mataji. The fervour and holy anticipation generated by Swamiji's visit may be easily

understood from the pregnant words spoken by the Chairman of the Reception Committee while according him a ceremonial reception on that day. "On a day like this," he reverentially exclaimed, "the venerable Mahendra Thera had set foot on Lanka's soil to introduce Buddhism to Ceylon." He expressed his conviction that Swamiji's message on life will be written in letters of gold when the history of spiritual awakening of modern Ceylon would be composed.

Going over to Colombo Swamiji received a tumultuous civic reception. The Mayor of Colombo, Vincent Perera, expressed his belief that Swamiji's presence with them would bring about a profound change in the country's social, moral and spiritual atmosphere. In his reply Swamiji first chanted some prayers and then went on to deliver a stirring speech. He concluded his talk by exhorting the audience: "O man, let not the unreal be allowed to cover up and hide the Real. Let not Reality be lost by the enshrouding darkness of unreality. Let not the clouds of ignorance be allowed to cover the radiance of knowledge. Let not the little existence, this little life here, a life of birth and death, be allowed to overcome, overpower and rob you of the true knowledge, your birthright, the consciousness and awareness of your immortal nature. You are immortal. You are the eternal spirit, neither born nor dead, unborn, undying, imperishable. You are ever-radiant presence, Divine Ray of Eternal Divine Light."

During his short stay of a week, Swamiji visited Colombo, Jaffna, Chunnakam, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Kurunegala, Kandy, University of Ceylon at Peradeniya, Nawalapitiya and Kataragama. In all these places he was accorded overwhelming receptions and he fulfilled memorable spiritual engagements.

At the public reception in the Jaffna Town Hall his address was particularly electrifying. He began with a devout prayer: "I offer unto Thee as my devout adoration

and at Thy feet all the activities of my life, all the actions of the body, feelings of the heart, thought of the mind, the movement of the innermost inborn nature, all life-activities and movements. All that I speak and do I offer unto Thee as my devout adoration, worship, love and dedication. May this be accepted by Thee, with Thy grace and compassion." The discourse that followed thereafter was surcharged with the self-same spirit of prayer and humble service at the feet of the Lord, manifest before him then as the citizens of Jaffna. He emphasised that God should be the most important business of life and that the way to God lay in the cultivation of truth, purity, universal love and compassion. He exhorted them to remember God constantly; even in the midst of all the activities of life, he said, one might retain a sense of communion. He advised them to cultivate the habit of doing silent Japa every now and then throughout the day and to do work as an offering to God. He concluded with a fervent appeal: "My beloved citizens of Jaffna! My beloved radiant and immortal souls! Live to move towards God. Live to fulfil virtue. Live to radiate and express your divine nature within you. This is the meaning of life. This is the purpose of life. This is the significance of life. This is your mission." Those who were present there still remember the electrifying impact the speech produced even on the curious listeners. Next, when Swamiji went to the Siva temple at Chunnakam there was an unprecedented concourse of people eager to accord a rousing reception.

The visit was all the more memorable for the devotees of Gurudev Sivananda, who felt that the Master himself had come to them in the frame of Chidananda. A veteran devotee named Nithialakshmy Tambiraja who knew the Master since 1940 felt that she was ultimately united with him in 1965 when Swamiji visited her residence at Kurunegala. She announced. "My tie with worldly life is now broken off completely." When Swamiji reached Kandy, the devotees there headed by Yogiraj

Swami Satchidanandaji and Mr. Sauly Maralaude prayerfully received him and presented a welcome address in honour of His Holiness. In his reply Swamiji politely stated that a monk lived to glorify God and God alone and the last thing he should ever desire was honour. With utmost humility he then added that compared to his Master, whose spirit he lived in, at whose feet he learnt all that he knew, he was just nothing. Then he poured forth his words of wisdom relating to the quest of Truth.

During his tour of Ceylon people of different persuasions and dogma showed him identical honour and affection. Siddhantis, Vedantis, Buddhists and Christians equally showered their love and regard on His Holiness. Swamiji for his part visited churches, temples and Buddhist shrines with equal fervour and worshipped the Lord in all the places. The consensus of opinion among all those people was that he infused into every one he met a Himalayan faith and strength in God. Men gazed at him with wonder and reverence, and muttered in admiration: here is a Godman who lives his teachings even more than he preaches it. Swamiji's personality, radiating the glow of holy penance, was captivating and irresistible. A renowned seeker of Ceylon, Bhakta Paduka, aptly observed, "Within the lovable and delicate form and appearance of this Mahatma, we see there a determination of the holy purpose of his mission in life, steel-minded and soldierly spiritual discipline, deep abhorence for anything sordid, unbecoming or mean, and above all his humility, truthfulness and transparent sincerity.... Really, the crowns of honour and glory placed many a time lovingly on his head by his numerous admirers, never for a moment remained on his head, because the head was heavy and bent down with the weighty philosophy of life and never stiff and uppish to hold the crowns."

Swamiji left Ceylon on 22nd June with a thrilling and vibrant parting Satsang. During the seventies he

visited the island on three separate occasions; every time he provided a fresh impetus for spiritual awakening to the masses in the beautiful land of Lanka. Today there are innumerable seekers there, who continue to cherish some one or other of those visits—visits which left an indelible impression.

A year after the Sri Lanka tour Swamiji moved out from the Ashram again—this time to visit Malaysia. Swami Pranavananda, Gurudev's deputy in this land beyond the Bay of Bengal, had been pressing His Holiness for his Malaysian tour. On receiving his loving invitation again in 1966 Swamiji journeyed from the Himalayas to Malaya and was there for twenty days during the spring. Malaya was the land where in the old days the Master had served as a doctor, bringing solace to many a poor and sick sufferer. Swamiji, therefore, characterised his journey as more of a pilgrimage than a spiritual tour. He left Delhi on the 5th April and flew into Kuala Lumpur the same evening. The immediate ostensible purpose of this trip was to unveil the marble statue of Gurudev in the spacious prayer hall at the Batu Caves, Sivanandashram. On the 9th April he performed this pleasant duty with a worshipful spirit and a deep sense of joy. In the midst of a huge gathering of people he performed the consecration ceremony of Gurudev's statue and spoke on the secret of right worship and God-Vision. Then he visited different branches of the Divine Life Society in the country. The multi-racial population of Malaysia with its variety at tastes and faiths was one in responding to the illustrious visitor with ardour and devotion. Malaysian statesmen like V.T. Sambanthan and V. Manikavasagam were deeply impressed by Swamiji's universal love and catholicity of outlook. The stir he created by his visit was responsible for dragging him once again to the country in later years.

From Malaysia Swamiji proceeded to Hongkong, where he conducted Satsangs for more than a week and returned to the Ashram in the Summer of 1966.

Swamiji now decided not to accede to requests for further tours abroad for some time to come. He kept himself busy for about two years in looking after the Ashram and the Society. But prayerful letters from different countries of the world kept pouring over his desk, soliciting his personal visits to those distant places in different parts of the globe. Devotees inside India, too, were anxious to meet him and hear his divine words. But this man of God had absolutely no time of his own. The Ashram required his presence; devotees inside Bharatavarsha pined to have his Darshan; genuine seekers of Sivananda Yoga Centres all over the world craved to receive spiritual guidance straight from his lips. There was only one Chidananda, however. And yet the same one form now determined to act as if it was many. Come what may, Swamiji decided to respond to the urgent calls from all directions with a spirit of dedication and service. Matters crystallised when Swami Sahajananda of Durban, the spiritual Head of the South African Divine Life Society, insistently appealed to Swamiji to come to South Africa. H.H. Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj urged Swamiji not to disappoint Swami Sahajananda. Swamiji worshipped Gurudev's sacred Padukas in the Samadhi Shrine and left the Ashram to serve the divine mission abroad.

The day—2nd May 1968—when Swamiji journeyed by sea from Bombay was a Thursday. It also happened to be the birthday anniversary of Jagadguru Adi Sankaracharya. By placing Gurudev's Paduka upon a special seat in the Bombay harbour premises itself, Swamiji invoked the grace of Lord Dattatreya, the Guru of Gurus, Jagadguru Sankara and Gurudev Sivananda upon all devotees who assembled there to see him off and embarked on his epoch-making tour.

He boarded the French ship "Cambodge" and travelled by sea from Bombay to South Africa. At Port Natal (Durban harbour), Swami Sahajanandaji received him. Right on the pier Swamiji offered his prayers to the

Lord, did some Kirtan and made a brief speech. Thus began again a protracted spell of divine service abroad. He reached Durban on the 10th May and the next day addressed the members of the Divine Life Society of Johannesburg who had come to pay their respects. On 12th he addressed the young students of the Sivananda Sunday School on the life and teachings of Gurudev.

The city of Durban was meanwhile ready to offer him a memorable civic reception. In a ceremonial meeting on the 13th May in the Durban city hall a vast surging crowd was anxiously waiting to behold the holy saint from the Himalayas. Enchantingly genial and humble, conducting himself like a good old friend of all those people, Swamiji came up and met Prof. S. P. Olivier, Rector of the University College, Durban, who was waiting there to receive him. Prof. Olivier escorted Swamiji to the dais and introduced him as a spiritual luminary of international fame. He then requested Swamiji to give the audience some special instructions. In his elevating talk Swamiji outlined the essentials of divine life and pointed out how one could live the divine life right in the hub of the busiest metropolis. He showed them how a life of true holiness was not at all incompatible with the day to day life of ordinary people, for divine life was simply divine consciousness permeating the human life.

Mr. Olivier was so greatly moved by Swamiji's personality and discourse that he appealed to him to visit the University College, Durban and inspire the students with his moving words. Swamiji gladly accepted the invitation. He visited the college and addressed the students and indicated how quest for the knowledge of the Self could find an important place in the curriculum of the Universities and pointed out that this knowledge demanded only a life of simplicity and purity. At the Springfield Teachers' Training College where he was invited next, Swamiji similarly dealt on the importance of character in student life and brought home this vitally

important truth with a number of homely examples. He also outlined a scheme for incorporating into the college curriculum a course on moral values.

Till the autumn of 1968 Swamiji remained busy with a crowded programme in South Africa, criss-crossing the country, moving out to a number of places such as Merebank, Northdam, Stanger, Dornall, Umzinto, Pietermarizeburg, Richmond, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Lenesia, East London, Port Elizabeth, Kimberly, Lady Smith and Cape Town. Wherever he went he appeared as a veritable divine messenger bringing home to the masses the lofty philosophy of Himalayan sages. His personality, more than his words, seemed to cast a spell on the people everywhere. It was a triumphant tour, indeed.

Even while he was thus spreading the message of Yoga and Vedanta in South Africa he received invitations from many other countries. First he responded to the request of Swami Venkatesananda for a visit to Mauritius. He flew to that island country and initiated the consecrated foundation ceremony of Sivananda Yoga Ashram. He stayed there for a week spreading his message in different parts of the country.

After this short stay at Mauritius he went to Rhodesia and carried on his holy service at Que Que, Salisbury and Bulawayo. He also visited Blantyre, capital of Malawi (former Nyasaland). At the insistent and loving invitation of the devoted seeker Uttam Ranchod, he had to proceed to Zambia next on a week's programme. Here he addressed the people at Lusaka, Livingstone, Luanshya, Mufilere, Chingola and Ndola.

From Ndola Swamiji was to leave for Mombasa. Now, a very interesting event happened in Kenya. He was scheduled to reach Mombasa that afternoon on the 17th November and address a public meeting the same evening. But it was found that there was no direct flight to Mombasa from Ndola. He was required to proceed to

Dar-es-Salam. It seemed as if the Mombasa programme was destined to be postponed, if not given up. But the organisers at Mombasa had already given wide publicity to the evening programme of Swamiji and a huge mass of devoted people was about to face a sorry disappointment. As the organisers there were cheerfully going about with their preparations Swamiji was still in the air, his plane heading for the Tanzanian capital, Dar-es-Salam. Now a miracle happened. When the plane approached the Dar-es-Salam airport, the ground control refused permission to the pilot for landing, saying that recent rains had made the airfield temporarily unsafe. The pilot was instructed to proceed instead to Mombasa airport. Thus the Zambian Airway jet flew on and landed at the Kenyan air port of Mombasa. The prayer of the devotees of Mombasa had been heard and the unexpected had taken place. Swamiji reached Mombasa in time to start the programme exactly on schedule as though the flight had been planned for it. On his landing at Mombasa Swamiji thanked God and told the devotees, "This is but one of the many ways at many times that the mysterious working of Gurudev's grace has been manifesting itself throughout".

Swamiji moved in the great continent of Africa till the end of November spreading the message of divine life in various parts of Kenya and Uganda. Then he left East Africa for West Germany, via Rome. For about a fortnight he was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Hans Franke in Porz Eil. Establishing his temporary headquarters there he was taken to different cities of West Germany drawing hundreds of persons by his magnetic charm and spreading the message of Yoga. His visit was very warmly reported in the newspapers of Cologne where he landed first. From this famous industrial city on the Rhine Swamiji proceeded to Erlangen, the well-known University town, where he gave an elevating discourse on "The way to God". On his way back from Erlangen he discovered that his plane was scheduled to land at

Radiating joy, peace and bliss

At the Vatican with Pope Paul VI

Frankfurt and from Frankfurt he was to change his plane for Cologne. This could have upset his programme at Cologne. But again the miracle happened, as earlier it had at Mombasa. Surprisingly enough the plane took the course direct to Cologne enabling Swamiji to attend the meeting there at the appropriate hour.

During this tour in West Germany Swamiji visited Dorch Hausen twice as the invited guest of the German mother Swami Sivapremananda Mataji at her Sivananda Yoga Schule. To a select but large audience here he gave a series of talks on a wide-ranging body of subjects—'Yoga for the West', 'Importance of a Guru', 'Universality of Yoga', 'Meditation', and such other topics of deep spiritual significance. He was hailed by several erudite scholars and pious Christians as an illustrious man of God of the modern times. One could see tears flowing from the eyes of some as they beheld Swamiji. They felt as if Swamiji had transferred some of his divine bliss to them. They were thrilled by his aura of purity and love. They felt that the greatest miracle about Swamiji was Swamiji himself. Even today they talk feelingly of Swamiji's profound impact on them and confess that they have not seen another person like him before or since. Once it so happened that during his stay there Swamiji had a long discussion with a group of Padres and theologians. At the end when they departed, one of them was so much inspired that he retired into the forest at once to contemplate deeply on Swamiji's words. Those Christian clergymen loved Swamiji so much that they once invited this 'Hindu' monk to chant holy Indian hymns in a very old and famous monastery. Accordingly Swamiji went there and the whole convent was thrilled to listen to him for nearly an hour. Swamiji stayed in Porz-Eil as the guest of Hans Franke, and delivered several lectures on 'Yoga and Christianity', 'Explanation about Yoga', 'Yoga in the Family', 'The Golden Period of Life' and 'The Truth About Yoga'. Subsequently he visited Porz-Eil thrice in the Seventies and inspired hundreds of

seekers to take to the Yoga of concentration and meditation.

From Germany Swamiji went to Amsterdam on the invitation of Dr. Lily E. Smulders, the well-known writer, traveller and painter, and stayed there for three weeks. Mother Palstra joined Dr. Smulders in arranging Swamiji's programme at Amsterdam. At their request Swamiji visited two centres of Yoga Society of Netherlands. He also appeared before the Hippies with his compassionate heart and message of hope. At the time of his arrival their club house was filled with smoke and there was a tumultuous scene. But with the approach of His Holiness a peculiar quietude prevailed and even the perverted souls listened to him with reverential regard. Swamiji served these wayward children of God and offered them necessary counsel for their evolution. He then spent the Christmas week in the midst of devotees from France, Belgium and Germany who had specially come to Amsterdam for the divine company of His Holiness.

After Christmas he went to London at the invitation of the Hindu community there. From London he proceeded to Paris as the guest of Mr. Guy Des Pinardes[13] who conducts today a branch of the Divine Life Society under the name "Centre Sivananda de Yoga Vedanta." Mr. Pinardes was keen to arrange a meeting between Swamiji and the Pope. It is through his efforts that Pope Paul VI and Swamiji Maharaj met in a semi-private audience on the 19th February, 1969. The Pope was so much filled with love at the very sight of this Indian saint that throwing to the winds the usual Vatican formalities he caught hold of the hands of Swamiji and kept them in his hands for a long time, exchanging words of courtesy with great feeling. He greeted Swamiji in the Indian style and Swamiji responded by greeting the Pope in Western fashion by

13 *Guy Des Pinardes has since passed away. God called him back in 1986.*

kneeling down in the name of Gurudev Sivananda. The moment the Pope heard the name of Sivananda he lovingly muttered, "I have heard of your Master's noble spiritual work. I appreciate very much your holy Master's spiritual work." Swamiji presented to the Pope Gurudev's work "Bliss Divine" as a token of love and regard. The Pope accepted the offering with immense joy and promised that he would read it with interest. During their talk he repeatedly exclaimed, "I love India. I love India," and said at one stage, "India is a wonderful place. I look forward to visiting India once again".[14] He said that he admired those who, having realised the Truth, came out to spread the gospel of the Religion of Love. Swamiji told the Pope about his mission of propagating the ideals of peace, love and spirituality as a representative of the Divine Life Society and sought his benediction. The Pope blessed Swamiji and wished him success in the holy mission. Then Swamiji handed over to him a prepared draft suggestion, requesting the Pope to sponsor a Congress of all faiths in Rome under the auspices of the Catholic Church. He also suggested to the Pope that he should launch forth a global visit to carry the message of religious unity. The Pope received the suggestion lovingly and said, "I shall look into it." He reciprocated his love by presenting to Swamiji a Souvenir Medal. That the spiritual head of the Christian world was deeply moved by the spiritual personality of Swamiji was clear to the few persons who were present there.

From Rome Swamiji left for Athens on a week's programme. During his tour of Greece he met the monks of the Greek Orthodox Church who lived in splendid isolation in Mount Athos. Only the monks and none else stay there. They do not ordinarily keep any contact with the outer world. But even they were very happy to meet Swamiji and exchange spiritual knowledge with him

14 *The Pope Paul VI had earlier visited India to attend the Eucharist Convention at Bombay.*

through a Greek interpreter. Swamiji stayed there in two monasteries which were about 1000 years old.

By April 1969 Swamiji had already moved through a good number of countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. Then he went across the Atlantic Ocean and travelled in the States and in Canada till October delivering some of his most interesting talks on 'Symbolism and Reality', 'Salvation and the Mind'. 'Path of Devotion', 'Karma and Natural Law', 'Yoga Psychology', 'Mantra', 'Meditation', 'Mystical Experience', etc. He gave a series of talks at New York, Vancouver and Val Morin. During this period he delivered a lecture on 'Man, Meditation and Liberation' at the University of British Columbia. He also inaugurated the Convention of the True World Order in the heart of Laurentian mountains and gave a series of lectures to students in Yoga classes at Valmorin.

Then he travelled to the Southern Hemisphere visiting South America, where he remained from October till the end of the year giving talks at places like Santiago-de-Chile, Buenos Aires, etc. At Montevideo (Uruguay) he had a television programme with a forum of priests, who put many probing questions on spiritual matters. Among many other revealing points, Swamiji here explained how without doing a single Asana or Pranayama one may yet be a true Yogi. He held that Yoga is not merely a psycho-physical science.

Swamiji then went to the West Indies at the loving invitation of Swami Satchidananda, Head of the Divine Life Society of Trinidad and Tobago. Here he had a crowded programme for a week. He spoke on 'The Essence of Religion' at Vivekananda Cultural Group, on 'Sanatana Dharma' at the Gopee Trace Hindu temple, on 'The Message of the Master' at the Chidananda Cultural Centre, on 'Yoga and its Importance to Health' at the Port-of-Spain Hindu Mandir, on 'Fundamental Unity of Faiths' at the Gandhi Ashram, on 'The Glory of Devotion and Divine Name' at Sant Kesav Das Ashram, on 'The

Path to Perfection' at Sieunaraine Dharma Sabha, on 'Divine Life', at Enterprise, on 'The Greatest Thing in Life' at Viswa Hindu Parishad, and on 'The Vedic Ideal of Life' at the Vedic School at Montrose. He also addressed the students of the University of West Indies at John F. Kennedy campus. He laid the foundation stone of the Chidananda Cultural Centre, assisted by Swami Satchidananda, Brahmachari Karmananda and Ramsaran Mangroo. Distinguished statesmen of the country like Sir Solomon Hochoy, Governor General, Mr. Gorad Montaho, Minister of Home Affairs, Sri Ray, the Indian High Commissioner, Mr. Kamaluddin Mohammed, Minister of West Indian Affairs, evinced keen interest to meet Swamiji and to listen to his illuminating talks.

Till his fifty-fourth birthday Swamiji stayed in the New World. Then he flew to Fiji. On his arrival at Nandi airport he was received by Sri Swami Rudrananda Maharaj of the local Ramakrishna Mission centre and Sri R.P. Gandhi. During his two weeks' stay at Fiji he toured almost the entire island, and exhorted the people to live the divine life.

From Fiji Swamiji proceeded to New Zealand for number of engagements and then to Australia. He reached Perth on the 18th October. Dr. R.J. Werther[15], President of the Perth Branch of the Divine Life Society, received him. In his inimitable way Swamiji talked in the House of Science and left an indelible impact on hundreds of seekers. During his stay in Australia, he felt satisfied with the spiritual evolution of Mr. Werther and initiated him into the holy order of Sannyasa with the new name of Swami Sangitananda. He spent three weeks in all in Australia fulfilling engagements in Perth, Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane and a few other places.

Near Adelaide Swamiji stayed for four days with the late revered Sri Swami Karunanandaji of loving memory,

15 *Gurudev sent Mr. Werther to Australia in 1956.*

the Australian Yogi and disciple of Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. Karunanandaji was at that time living in a forest hermitage a few miles outside Adelaide. He was then releasing a monthly hand-printed journal on Yoga on behalf of the Divine Life Society. Swami Chidanandaji was immensely happy to meet this good soul and share his feelings with him. He regarded Karunanandaji as a highly evolved spiritual personality, a realised soul. Karunanandaji had similar reverence for Chidanandaji, his beloved Guru Bhai. Yovnne Lebeau rightly observes: "To see them together, to see their love was a wonderful, unforgettable experience. Karunananda's face radiated devotion when he spoke of Chidananda". Swamiji's stay in the forest hermitage of Karunanandaji near Adelaide was a memorable one, for in such meetings of the great one's God-experience expresses itself in their words and gestures.

During Swamiji's stay in Aus ralia other personalities who arranged his public and private programmes, were Dr. Vijayendra, son of the veteran Yoga teacher Sri Yogendra of Bombay, who conducted a Yoga centre in Melbourne University and Roma Blair (Nirmalananda), the well-known Yoga preacher of Australia, who has a nation-wide television Yoga lesson programme.

Swamiji was now on his way back to the Himalayas. He spent the month of November in Philippines and Hongkong, fulfilling old promises and delivering discourses at a number of places. Then by 24th November he moved to Malaysia. After a short visit to Jaffna for the inauguration of the new prayer hall of the local branch of the Divine Life Society he came to Bombay, where he was given a rousing reception. He reached New Delhi on 20th December and addressed the citizens of the Capital in a ceremonial function that was organised in the Swami Sivananda Cultural Association in his honour. This marked the conclusion of yet another of his prodigious tours.

On 22nd December, 1970, Swamiji came back to the Ashram. The Ashramites and devotees of Rishikesh who were hearing so much for the last two years about the memorable services being rendered by Swamiji in course of his global tour, were anxiously awaiting his arrival. Swami Krishnananda, the acting President, was the first to garland him on his arrival at the gateway of the Ashram and receive him with great joy bowing down at his holy feet. Swamiji reciprocated with his characteristic humility. He touched the feet of Krishnanandaji and embraced him. Swamiji suddenly pushed forward through the vast crowd assembled there to receive him and moved to the sacred Samadhi Shrine of Gurudev, like a child eager to meet his mother after a long separation. He paid his homage to the Master in silence. Coming out, he talked to the assembled Guru Bhais and Ashramites for a few moments and then quietly moved in, resuming his duties as if he had been absent only for a day or two, as if nothing special had happened in the immediate past. No wonder that people are moved to describe him as a real Sthitaprajna.

This great global tour was not the last of Swamiji's foreign travels. He has been going abroad time and again under pressure of his admirers and devotees. Thus for a month in 1972 he had to visit Lebanon, West Germany and Berlin. In 1973, again, he went to Beirut on a special programme arranged by mother Shanta of the Yoga Shanti Niketan, to give a series of lectures on Yoga Sutras to a select group of Yoga students. In 1975 he had to fly to Bahama Islands in order to participate in a Yoga teachers' congress there. He also joined a spiritual delegation which was formed to convey the message of Vardhamana Mahavira through different parts of the world. Again in December the same year he had to visit Malaysia on a three weeks' programme. In December 1976 he paid a visit to Singapore to address the delegates of the Asian Conference of Religion and Peace. The protracted solicitations of the devotees of

Johannesburg[16] dragged him there on a long programme. It so happened that he had to spend at a stretch long seven months, from November '77 to June '78, touring many parts of South Africa and Europe. And thus it has gone on. Thoroughly unconcerned about his health and comforts this man of mercy has been ever on the move from one institution or occasion to another, through different parts of the world, in season and out of season, for the sake of others and always at the appropriate hour.

Wherever Swamiji went he felt naturally at home there. While he was at Durban, for instance, by the side of the river Umegni he took to it eagerly, calling it the holy Ganges of South Africa. He moved around the world as a living embodiment of divine life. While others called and felt him to be a great man of God he always behaved as an humble ambassador of his Holy Master, doing the task enjoined upon him, the task of being a holy messenger of love, carrying the message of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. He appeared before the Westerners as a magnificent example of the hoary wisdom of India and as an embodiment of love and compassion, a veritable St. Francis of the modern age. The seekers and wise men of

16 *On Swamiji's arrival at Johannesburg a very touching event took place. An ardent devotee of Swamiji, mother Rose Kagan, popularly known as Sivananda Kausalya, had been on the death-bed for quite sometime. Before she had fallen into a state of coma, she had prayed for a final Darshan of His Holiness. It was, however, difficult to believe that her desire could be fulfilled. But indeed her prayer was heard. The compassionate Swamiji who knows and responds to the hearts of the devotees was there beside her before she breathed her last. After his arrival at her bed-side, he prayed for sometime and the fortunate lady regained her consciousness for a few moments to behold him sitting by her bed. She greeted Swamiji with folded hands uttering distinctly 'Hari Om' and with this God remembrance and holy Darshan of the divine Guru she left her mortal frame. Fortunate was she, indeed, for her funeral rite was also sanctified by the presence of His Holiness.*

Europe and America, who were tired of meeting either money-making monks or men with only psychic powers, found in him a master worthy of the deepest love and reverence. Even in this dark period of spiritual cynicism and growing materialism, particularly the men of the West with their relatively extreme form of scientific skepticism found in him an unbelievably pure and effulgent manifestation of divinity. It was never felt necessary by anyone to wait for an introduction to realise his spiritual greatness. Significantly enough, the Western men who came across him never measured him with spurious spiritual yardsticks like miracles or boons. They sought him again and again for the rarer thing—palpable experience of divine bliss—and felt profoundly satisfied merely by drawing close to his physical presence.

Swamiji has carried the message of hope for men in all states of evolution. Even the drug addicts and criminals behind the prison bars have eagerly welcomed his presence. In a prison in San Francisco his sight and words brought tears to the eyes of hardened criminals. Even highly sophisticated persons have experienced a wonderful state of innocence, joy and exaltation in his presence. Sara Hermana of Buenos Aires (Argentina) wrote, "Many years have passed since Swami Chidananda left us, but he lives always in our hearts. He has given us the aspiration to become better, to purify ourselves. His presence raised a great enthusiasm in Buenos Aires. In the day he spent with us all wanted to retain him by their side. Everywhere he left an indelible memory. His presence is always with us and his light still illumines our hearts."

In the West he impressed upon the seekers that approach to the knowledge of one's self includes also a knowledge of others, of the world and of the society, so that Yoga is an allround process. Spirituality, he said, is a world culture, to achieve which has to be the ultimate aim of all mankind. In a very homely manner he

conveyed the central idea that Yoga is the technical name of this all-round approach. The catholic spirit and universal love and understanding Swamiji revealed in his interpretation of ancient Shastras appealed to all, irrespective of their creed and calling. When he walked through the gardens and the lawn, people in the neighbourhood flocked to watch the glow in his face and observe Divinity manifesting itself in every bit of his acts and movements. He never wanted to demonstrate Siddhis. But a simple prayer of this compassionate Godman could do wonders. There have been innumerable instances when the devotees all over the globe have testified that his blessings have saved people from grave misfortunes. The cases comprise a wide variety of experiences, from robbers' revolvers to incurable infections. Few, however, have ever bothered to recount these experiences on platforms. For, the holiness of his presence, the purity and humility he exuded was in itself the highest guarantee of spirituality. Again and again one hears people echo the strains of what a commentator said, "We see him live all he preaches and such a one can move the world".

Swamiji's words of wisdom have revolutionalised a great many lives. Mother Simonetta de Cessario was a leading Italian designer with a famous fashion house in Paris. A lecture of Swamiji she heard in Paris changed her life. She dedicated herself to the quest of God and service of the lowliest among men. William C. Eilers was the director of a business company. But the contact with Swamiji suddenly made him indrawn, and very soon he dedicated his life to the higher duty. Don Briddel, who was a Peace Corps volunteer was similarly drawn by the aura of Swamiji. Mother Paula was a nurse in James Town. Swamiji's blessings totally transformed her life.

To all corners of the globe he conveyed the timeless message of Eternal Truth. He showed that the aim of all religions was to elevate humanity to the state of Divinity. He convinced people of diverse creeds that a life of Yoga

meant the divine life permeating the human frame. Wherever he spoke he made a deep impression in the hearts of people and inspired them to take to the path of spirituality, converting many of those men of clay into dynamic spiritual heroes. Those who were unable to immediately launch upon such a heroic venture, were at least awakened from their deep slumber of spirit. To the dizzy, restless West he carried the assurance of serenity and peace. He showed that spiritual advancement was perfectly compatible with the busy schedule of a modern life, that spirituality could be cultivated as much on the concrete highways of the metropolis as on the rarefied heights of the Himalayas. To a society beset with mean and violent competition, he showed the glory of self-effacement and self-denial and instilled in the people a new faith and transmitted into them a new joy in the higher life of the spirit. And this he did as much by his electrifying speeches and stirring Kirtans as by his own magnificent example.

IN THE COMPANY OF SAINTS

For two decades now Chidananda has journeyed through the world covering vast distances and blazing a trail of glory across the continents. Devotion and praises of an incomparable magnitude have been showered upon him; a vast number of people and cities have been clamouring for his Darshan; highly eminent persons, both spiritual and temporal, have offered him their homage and goodwill; but he has remained the same humble and simple saint, as ever, the same pure prism, radiating the light of the Master. If he has any personal desire, apart from Lokasangraha and solitary Sadhana, it is for the company of saints. That he is himself a saint of a very high order never strikes him as being a sufficient cause for keeping himself in some exalted seclusion.

The Holy Master had said again and again that Chidananda is a born saint, an ideal Yogi, a Para Bhakta and a great sage and the truth of this assertion is borne out by Swamiji's life and acts in manifold ways. Only a great saint could have the immaculate personal purity and profound compassion for fellow men that have characterised his entire life. On the one hand, with all his compassion and ceaseless service he remains constantly established in the secret chamber of his heart, one with the timeless and the deathless. On the other, with all his detachment and complete personal contentment, he is yet ever of longing to meet and talk to saints of all creeds and places. If that be the response of the common run of humanity, how is he viewed by people of similar attainments as his? How does Swamiji conduct himself towards saints and Yogis and how is he, in turn, regarded and treated by them? The ways of saints are inscrutable; the language of their communication is too

esoteric and mystical for us. And, yet, now and then, their mutual responses and appreciations surface and that is, indeed, a subject of profound interest to one striving to understand the greatness of the holy men in question.

Saintliness has had an irresistible attraction for Swamiji all through his life. This saintliness is not something that comes under a particular class or discipline. Unlike an average monk, Swamiji from his early days was sensitive enough to note and appreciate saintliness wherever he found it. An ochre robe was not necessarily the only passport into his heart. Gandhiji, for instance, remained for him a great saint all his life. He was one of the very first saints who came into his life at a very tender age and left an indelible stamp on his personality. Truth, non-violence and purity, which were Bapuji's gospel, became the personal creed of Sridhara from his early life. Ram Nam, which was almost the life-breath of Gandhiji, found a similar home in his heart.

Indeed, one may see a number of important matters which seem to have comprised Gandhiji's impact on Swamiji. One may point out, for instance, his service of lepers and worship of Harijans. People were struck with awe and wonder to observe the way in which he honoured the Harijan guests by literally prostrating at their feet and asking for Prasad from their plates on the Gandhi Jayanti day. The Holy Master Sivananda, too, had a similar regard for Gandhiji, whom he used to send all his publications as a token of love. Once he deputed Swamiji as his personal representative with a good number of his latest works on Yoga. It was a torrid June day of 1946, when Swamiji, then a junior Brahmachari without an ochre garb, proceeded to the Dalit colony at the northern end of the Reading Road (now Mandir Marg) in Delhi, where the Mahatma was then staying. It was 2.30 p.m. when he reached. The day was extremely hot and Gandhiji was then resting on a wooden plank inside a thatched mud hut with a moist towel round his head.

The uncrowned king of India was thus resting when this junior Brahmachari of Sivanandashram was ushered into his presence.

Two illumined Sevaks of humanity met in a simple environment. Swamiji saluted Bapuji placing his forehead at his feet with utmost humility—a very instructive gesture for Sadhaks who usually conduct themselves with some subtle superiority in respect of people who have not donned the holy garb, irrespective of their merit. Bapuji made kind enquiries about Gurudev and expressed his happiness on periodically receiving the valuable works of Sivanandaji Maharaj. Then Swamiji presented the latest bundle of the Master's books. Gandhiji untied the bundle with great love and glanced through each book with reverence. He knew the work of the Divine Life Society and voiced his warm appreciation. Before Swamiji took leave of him he sought the blessings of Bapuji. At this, Gandhiji, who for his part had been struck by the saintly nature of Swamiji, said, "You are already blessed. May the Almighty grant you His grace in your quest." When Swamiji asked him for a message for Gurudev, the Mahatma replied with great humility, "What message can I give? Swamiji's message of spiritual living is inspiring thousands all over the world. We need such good work. Please convey to him my Pranams." While saying so, Gandhiji brought his palms together in salutation.

This was the second and the last meeting that Swamiji had with the Mahatma. It was nothing very intimate or spectacular, and yet Gandhiji remained a lifelong inspiration to Swami Chidananda. The deep regard of Swamiji for Gandhiji is brought out from the following lines which he declared on the occasion of the Gandhi centenary celebrations in 1969: "It is a blessed year marking the centenary of this truly great soul's advent upon earth. To me this Gandhi year really signifies a Ram-Nam year as well as a year of truth-speaking, promise-keeping, self-searching, fasting

and praying and selfless serving. To me all these mean Gandhiji."

There is something specially educative about Swamiji's conduct in the company of saints. True to the Bharatiya Parampara he bows down in great humility before the elderly monks and offers them hospitality and honour in a exceedingly polite and meticulous fashion. During the life of the Master, eminent elderly spiritual personalities like Mahamandaleswar Swami Vishnudevanandaji Maharaj of Kailash Ashram, Swami Tapovanji Maharaj, the crest jewel and beaconlight of the Himalayas hailing from Uttarakashi and the Holy Master's Purvashram classmate Kavi Yogi Maharshi Suddhananda Bharati, the saint-scholar of South India, used to visit the Ashram. Swamiji, then the General Secretary, used to take upon himself all the responsibility of serving them and did it with his proverbial humility. He considered a meeting with Kavi Yogi equivalent to a century of Satsang. He was similarly keen to meet the Mahamandaleswar of Kailash Ashram at least once a year with offerings from the Master.

During his early days in the Sivanandashram Swamiji once fell ill. Gurudev made arrangements for his treatment under a well-known Ayurvedic doctor at Haridwar. Swamiji was to stay with a devotee of Gurudev there. During that period when he was receiving treatment at Haridwar he came in contact with a saint called Swami Atmananda, a disciple of the renowned Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj of the Brahmananda Bhajanavali fame. In course of their conversations Swami Atmanandaji used to emphasise a very vital aspect in a Sadhak's life. He used to lay much stress on the fact that the Sadhak had to keep away from worldly persons. If it is not possible to be in the company of the wise, it is better for him to remain in complete seclusion. The company of the wise, however, was, he held, essential for a seeker. The importance of Satsang

emphasised by Swami Atmananda made a deep impact on Swamiji's mind.

Whenever Gurudev sent Swamiji on some work to other places, he would never miss an opportunity of calling upon the holy man in the neighbourhood. Once, Swamiji came to know that an enlightened soul, Paramahamsa Narayana Swami, had just then visited Swargashram. Narayan Swami had been a Judge in his Purvashram. One day in his fiftieth year he dreamt Lord Narayana in the form of his preceptor. At the very next morning he renounced his prosperous career and journeyed to Badrinath where Lord Narayana manifested Himself before him in front of the temple. Therefore, he remained engrossed in Sadhana all the time, day and night, immersed in God-consciousness. Sometimes he used to stay on the banks of the Narmada and at other times in Badrinath. Only in mid-winter he used to stay for a few days in Swargashram. It was during one such visits that Swami Chidanandaji met this great Tapasvi and later came in closer contact with the blessed soul. When he saw the saint at Swargashram he found that the only possession the saint had were a gunny bag which was used as a piece of clothing and the "Hansa Danda". By that time Narayana Swami had already completed a vow of silence extending over a long period of twenty five years. He used to lay emphasis on truthfulness and sweetness of speech. He laid particular stress on the proper choice of food for a Sadhak. Another point that he made before Swamiji was the necessity of doing Japa of at least eleven Maalas (i.e., repetition of 1188 times of one's own Ishta Mantra) daily without fail. Swamiji found him to be a personification of humility and simplicity. The saint lived only on milk and upon boiled potatoes fried in a little ghee without salt. One day Swamiji saw him in a jungle in the morning hours immersed in the repetition of the Divine Name "Om Namo Narayana", radiating celestial joy from his blissful countenance. Swamiji saw him in this blissful state for

over an hour or two and himself experienced the bliss of the inner Self in that state of solitude. Association with such saints has always been a memorable and living experience of Swamiji all through his life.

The quality of Swamiji's relationship with eminent divine personalities really defies description. In the present times there shines in the spiritual world Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi as a rare and lofty divine personality. Swamiji's relationship and behaviour with her are truly of an elevating and thrilling kind. The depth of love and esteem the two express for each other reveals a truly divine order of communion. It was in the spring of 1948 that revered Swamiji first met the venerable mother at Varanasi. He was then returning from Nagpur from his long period of convalescence at the Mayo Hospital. On his way back to Sivanandashram he halted at Varanasi and proceeded to the holy Ashram of the Mother. Sri Ma was then conducting a Gayatri Mahayajna which continued for three years. It was in the midst of the sacred sacrifice that the two divine personalities met each other. Eight years later when the holy mother came to meet the holy master Sivananda at Rishikesh, he had once again a glorious opportunity of enjoying her divine company.

After the Mahasamadhi of the Master, Swamiji and the venerable mother met each other for the bliss of Satsang on a number of occasions. When the birth anniversary of Gurudev was celebrated in 1964 the worshipful Ma Anandamayi graced the function to offer her homage to the hallowed memory of Gurudev. Sri Ma has an uncommon love and regard for Swami Sivanandaji and Swami Chidanandaji. She does not make any distinction between the two, even today sometimes addressing Swamiji as Sivananda Baba. She is full of admiration for Chidanandaji Maharaj. Even his ordinary gestures, she thinks, are worthy of note. She has been heard saying, "Swamiji's attitude, even when he is still, is a most beautiful Mudra". She loves him as her

child, honours him as a Yogi, admires him as a saint and treats him as a friend. Swamiji similarly regards her as the very Divine Mother incarnate.

The holy Mother always extends her loving invitation to Swamiji to attend and to address the participants in the Samyama Saptaha Mahavrata, periodically organised by the Sri Anandamayi Sangha. Swamiji makes it a point to attend these functions, whenever possible, at various places in India. Recently, at Bhasha Gram near Kolkata, devotees of Sri Ma invited Swamiji to attend a similar function near Ahmedabad for three days. The mother in whose presence the invitation was extended, commented that three days would be inadequate for Baba and requested him to attend the function for at least five days. Swamiji begged the mother to kindly excuse him for he had already given his word to some other people to attend their functions during the same period. In a tone full of tender maternal regret Anandamayi expressed her sorrow that Baba would not attend, after all. At this Swamiji emphasised in a resonant tone, "If that be the wish of the holy Mother, the servant shall certainly be at both the places." For Swamiji, who is ever vigilant not to give out in public any suggestions of extraordinary feats, to make such an assertion not merely indicates the supraphysical level at which great saints contact but also the great esteem he has for her.

As indicated above, Swamiji often attends the Sadhana programmes of Sri Anandamayi Sangha. Once he reached the Ashram of the Mother at Brindavan to attend a Samyama Saptaha. When the news of his arrival was carried to the worshipful Mother she instantly came out to receive him personally. When Swamiji saw her advancing towards him he at once prostrated himself on the ground. The mother appeared to be taken aback for a brief moment, and tenderly protested by saying, "Baba, what are you doing"! Swamiji said nothing, for there was nothing to say. He was merely his usual self, namely, a

personification of humility and Sadachara. The mother then continued to outline the programme of the function and wanted to know from Swamiji whether he felt it to be "all right". Meekly Swamiji replied, "When Mother is there, everything is bound to be all right". At this, Ma burst into a peal of laughter and then in a solemn tone declared, "If there is any deficiency, Baba himself will please set it right. After all, this Ashram also belongs to Baba." In course of their talk she reminded him that the next day was Ekadasi. Swamiji politely said that being a participant in the Samyama Saptaha he had already enrolled himself in the Vrat. The mother intoned, "Oh! Baba is in the eternal state of spiritual discipline." This pithy statement of a God-realised soul of the stature of Ma Anandamayi speaks volumes about Swamiji's inner state of perennial penance. Being what he is, Swamiji does not need to observe fasts and other austerities. Yet he always observes the proper external discipline by way of being an example to other seekers and keeping the physical frame under the permanent rigours of discipline. As the Lord has put forth in the Gita (III, 21-22). "Whatever an eminent person does people around him imitate. Whatever he sets up as the standard, that the mankind follows. There is nothing in the three worlds, O Arjuna, that should be done by Me, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained. Yet I engage Myself in action."

The day Swamiji was to take leave, the worshipful mother joined him in a Satsang. Both Swamiji and Mataji were surrounded by devotees. A devotee who wished to take a photograph prayed Swamiji to kindly move close to Mataji. With alacrity Swamiji moved very close to the mother and commented, "Do you think I am ever far from Mother? I am always in her proximity". At this the mother beamed with a radiant smile. After the snap was over Swamiji humorously told the photographer: "Please send me a copy of the photograph so that I shall see how close I am to the mother."

A good number of seekers took part in that Sadhana programme. They were mostly young Sanskrit students of the Mother's Ashram school and they served Swamiji very nicely during his short stay. As a token of his appreciation and gratitude, Swamiji offered them some boxes of sweets and fruits. Somebody, however, informed him that the participants were forbidden to eat any food other than what was served to them. On hearing this Swamiji deputed his disciple Swami Asheshananda to go with the presents to the Mother and convey to her the intention behind the offering. When Asheshanandaji conveyed the same, Sri Ma remained silent for a moment. Immediately, however, she broke into a smile and exclaimed, <169>It is all right. If Baba is pleased to procure sweets for the participant Sadhaks, the sweets are converted into Baba's Prasad. I shall myself distribute the sweets to all of them. Please convey this to Baba." This little incident reveals the holy Mother's exceptional regard for Swamiji. Rules are meant for discipline. But there are also situations when a divine touch warrants the transcendence of ordinary rules to human institutions.

Words indeed fail to describe in full the beauty of a meeting between Ma and Swamiji. Their love and esteem for each other is of a truly divine order. Their meeting transcends all earthly contacts. It is a veritable divine association. Swamiji as though loses himself in a flood of ecstasy and forgets all else whenever he is in her holy presence, a most remarkable and mysterious thing to happen, indeed, to a man of uncommon poise as he. Once in 1973 before the All-India Divine Life Conference scheduled to be held at New Delhi, Swamiji was visiting Brindavan for three days to live in the company of the holy Mother. By that time the organisers of the conference had personally handed over their letter of invitation to the Mother to grace the occasion. As usual mother had not given any definite answer, leaving the matter to Providence. So the organisers requested

Swamiji to kindly invite Mataji when he met her at Brindavan. Swamiji heard them in silence but offered no comments. He spent three days in Brindavan in the divine company of the holy Mother. But they had no talk about the conference. On Swamiji's return from Brindavan the organisers met him and enquired about the programme of the Mother. At this Swamiji suddenly stopped and then slowly muttered, "I forgot everything in Brindavan. I was in some other world". He again added, "In the company of the Mother I forget everything."

Justice R.D. Mudholkar, who is a great devotee of Gurudev, wished to build a Kutir in the Ashram for his daughter, Dr. Aruna, who is a devoted disciple of Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma. When the building was complete, the Mother came to attend the opening ceremony. In a touching scene she presented Aruna to Swamiji by naming her as his own daughter and announced to the others that there was no difference between Baba and herself. As far as Swamiji's love and reverence for the mother are concerned, they are too well-known to need further elaboration. Swamiji is emphatic that Sri Ma is one of those rarest of saints who remain eternally in a state of Sahaja Samadhi. To him she is not a saint—she is pure divinity.

While on her way to Uttarakashi the holy Mother at times visits Sivanandashram. The Ashramites remember one particular visit with special joy. Once in the summer of '76 she suddenly made her appearance in the Ashram. She was received by Swamiji in a special Satsang. The holy Mother was moved by the divine ecstasy of revered Swamiji. The atmosphere was surcharged with spiritual vibrations. And lo! Mother herself went ecstatic and poured forth her favourite Kirtan. "Hey Bhagavan! Hey Bhagavan!" in her inimitable way, instilling an unforgettable mystical fervour and bliss into every one present there.

During the Diamond Jubilee birthday celebrations of Swamiji Maharaj, Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi made her dramatic appearance on the stage after Swamiji had just commented that the holy Mother was expected to grace the occasion. Then there was a moving sight to be seen, a veritable spiritual feast for the eyes. The mother approached Swamiji full of affection and joy, with baskets of fruits and flowers. Swamiji at once began vibrantly intoning some verses in praise of the Divine Mother by way of expressing his adoration. The two divine personalities exchanged their deep Bhav and regard in a thrilling manner before the multitude of Jijnasus, Mumukshus and saints. On this occasion Swamiji casually expressed before her that he had done his duty and that he was no more interested to retain the earthly frame. The worshipful Mother, touched to the core, solicitously asserted that he should continue to bless the world with his presence for many more years to come. At the request of Swamiji the holy Mother then graciously answered some of the questions of the seekers assembled there. We might offer a small excerpt here:

Seeker: Why are there obstacles in following the spiritual path as per Guru's instructions?

Mother: If Guru is there, then obstacles vanish automatically. Baadha (obstacle) and Guru are incompatible.

Seeker: How is it that all the pupils do not receive their common Guru's grace equally?

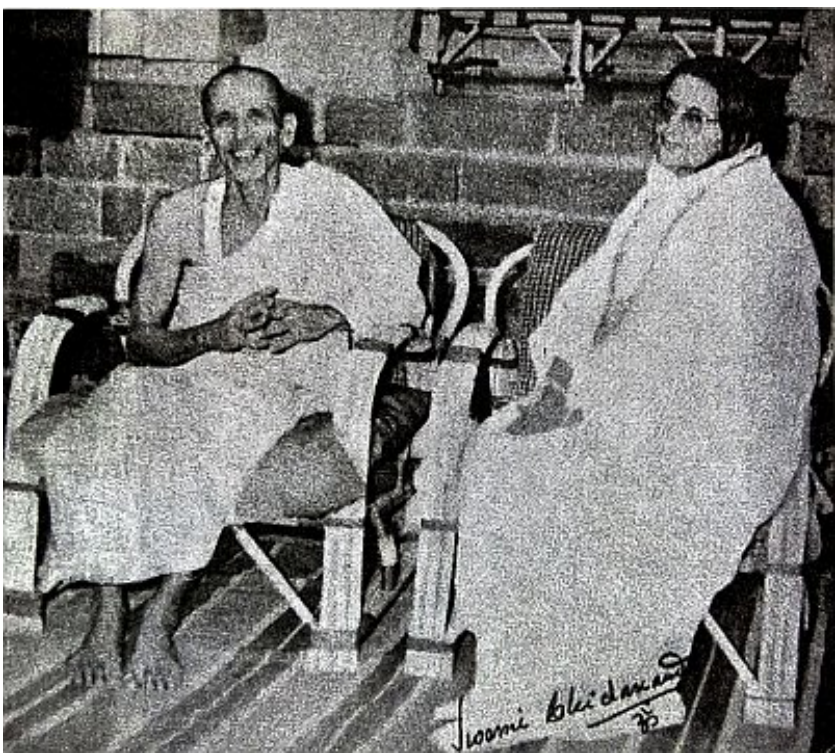
Mother: By keeping their vessel upside down they deprive themselves of the same.

Seeker: What is the aim of life?

Mother: To know Him.

Seeker: Can God be seen?

Mother: Yes. If the desire is keen, if the seeker is truly earnest, then he can have His Darshan here and



In the blissful company of Ma Anandamayi

Exchanging holy greetings

now. The point is we do not wholeheartedly thirst for Him, whereas He wants the whole of us.

At one of their meetings at Gondal a devotee asked the Mother about the time when she had attained Self-realisation. Before the Mother said anything Swamiji quipped. "It is just like asking when did Lord Krishna achieve Self-realisation." The moving combination of loving and respectful attitude the Mother has towards Swamiji was experienced by the present author himself when he met her at Kankhal to invite her to the 27th All-India Divine Life Conference. The Mother expressed her inability to attend on account of ill health and pleaded that she should not be pressed. When the author mentioned that Swamiji would be presiding over the conference and prayed for her blessings, there was an immediate perceptible change in her bearing. In her sweet and vibrant tone she asked the author to convey her "Om Namo Narayanaya" to Chidananda Baba and then gravely emphasised that by the very presence of Swamiji the conference was destined to be blessed and her best wishes were always there in all that Swamiji did.

With all his busy schedule round the year, the itinerary extending to distant parts of the globe, Swamiji yet succeeds in wrenching himself free every now and then to be in the company of some saint or other. That is the atmosphere he longs for; at the mental plane that is the world which perhaps he continually inhabits. Whenever he meets a saint he at once goes forward with humility and meekness to offer his regard. This Sadachara constitutes an inspiring example to all. He is a Vedantin of the highest order eternally resting in his Satchidananda Swarupa. But he worships all the manifest forms of the Absolute and pays obeisance to their votaries and Siddhas.

Nimkaroli Baba, a wonder mystic of North India, a Hanuman Siddha, was one such saint for whom Swamiji had very high regard. Babaji Maharaj used to stay in his

Ashram at Kainchi near Nainital in the Kumaon hills. Once in the autumn of 1973 Swamiji reached the Ashram of Baba late in the evening. When he went in, after soliciting due permission, he found the Baba seated on a cot, wrapped in a simple blanket. The Baba displayed no emotion whatever while receiving Swamiji. He was as usual seated on the cot and thus received Swamiji and his party with a benign look and motioned them to sit down on the carpet, spread near the cot. The young and idealistic companion of Swamiji, Sri Yogesh Bahuguna, was a little upset because of the seemingly cold and casual reception accorded to Swamiji. Swamiji, however, was his usual self. He knelt down beside the cot and humbly offered his homage to the Baba and after sometime sang a few Bhajans and Stotras in praise of Lord Hanuman. At the close of Swamiji's Kirtan, the usually reticent and severe-looking Baba instructed all his disciples to bow down at the feet of Swamiji and declared that if they did not do so, they would miss a unique opportunity of prostrating before an illumined sage of high order. At this Swamiji in his natural way rubbed his palms in utmost humility and said that he was just an ordinary servant of Gurudev Sivananda, who was, indeed, a towering saint. But he added in his inimitable way, that if a person held a flower for a considerable length of time it was natural that the fragrance could be smelt on the palms. Therefore, it was no wonder if the fragrance of Gurudev's virtues was sometimes wafted through him because of his fortunate protracted contact. This is the Chidananda way and thus does Swamiji shine in the world of saints with his childlike simplicity, humility and majesty.

Happily thereafter, the worshipful Baba started distributing Prasad from the basket which lay on his side. Sri Yogesh Bahuguna had brought with him only seven or eight apples and had placed them in the empty basket lying there. But Babaji continued taking apples one after another till he had served eighteen fruits in all.

Yogeshji stood amazed. Swamiji later explained that it was due to his Siddhi obtained through the worship of Sri Hanuman.

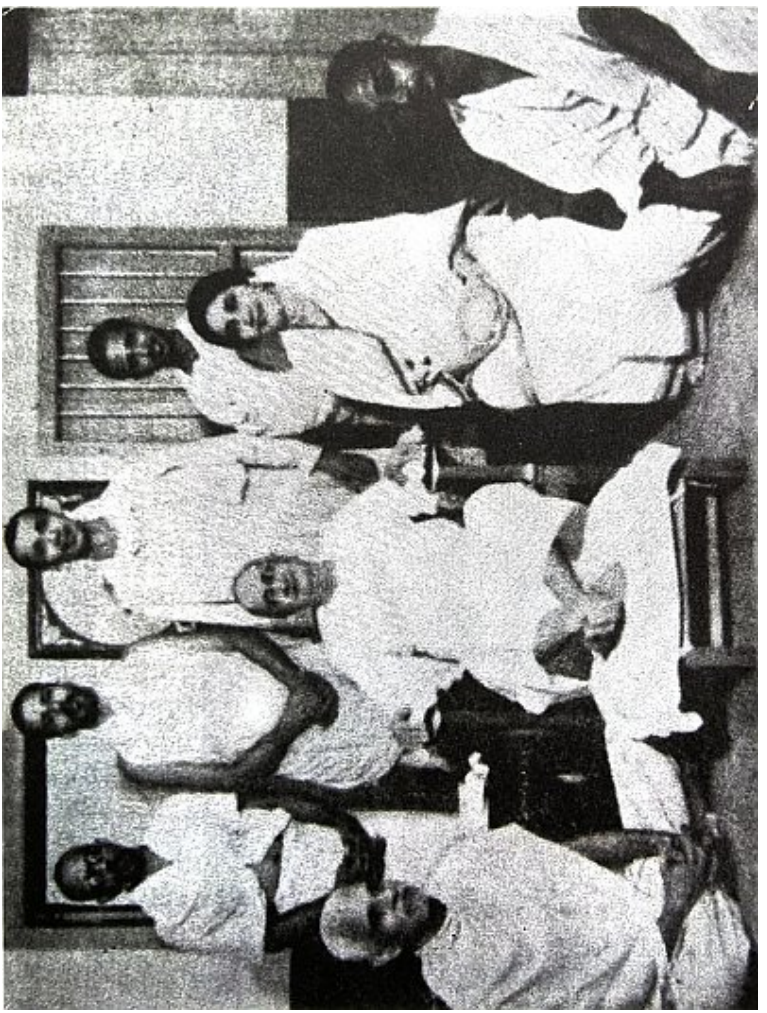
He informed that he had known of Babaji's Siddhis long back in 1953 when the old father of the then District Magistrate of Tehri Garhwal, Mr. Trivedi, I.A.S., visited Sivanandashram and told Gurudev in Swamiji's presence about the various miraculous acts of his Guru Sri Baba Nimkaroliji of Nainital. Through his Hanuman Siddhi the Baba could suddenly materialise from air at distant places merely by wishing to do so. The Baba had great love and regard for Swamiji. After the Mahasamadhi of Sri Gurudev once, all of a sudden, Babaji descended in the Ashram. When Swamiji came out to receive him he was already in the outer verandah of the President's Kutir. Swamiji bowed down at his feet, took him inside and had him seated upon an Asan. Babaji expressed his great satisfaction at the noble service being rendered by the Divine Life Society and on the request of Swamiji partook of some warm cow's milk. At such meetings one felt that there was some kind of an inner communion between Swamiji and Babaji. Despite his taciturn nature and outer reserve Babaji was aware of the spiritual glory of Swamiji and he used to express his special appreciation and affection by his look and gesture.

Swamiji's reverence for the pontiffs of the seats of Sri Sankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, Sri Madhvacharya and other great Acharyas has been exemplary. He himself, however, is a follower of the Kevala Adwaita philosophy of Sri Sankaracharya. His reverence for Jagadguru Sri Chandrasekhara Saraswati, senior pontiff of the Kanchikamakoti Pitha, is especially great. Once in 1973 while he was touring South India he wished to pay his regards to the Jagadguru who is honoured as a God-realised soul. At that time the Jagadguru was residing in a Siva temple in a nearby village. He was then observing complete Mauna. Swamiji appeared at the gate

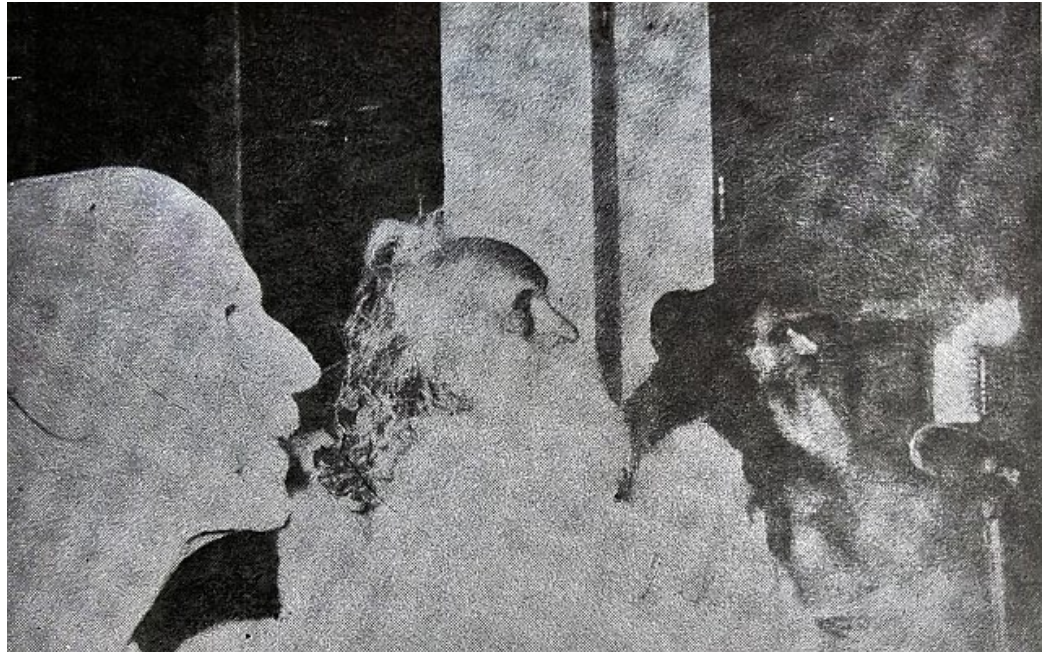
of the temple with a basketful of fruits in his hands, clad only in one piece of cloth in that winter night. He silently entered the temple and without making any announcement whatsoever prostrated before the senior pontiff. By gesture and gaze the pontiff extended his joyous blessings, but there was no talk between the Acharya and Swamiji. Yet it was quite a satisfying visit to Swamiji. For those who can commune through the spirit, the language of the human tongue is hardly important.

Another such senior saint of modern India is Thakur Sri Sitaram Das Omkarnath Maharaj, who upholds the Sadhana of the Mahamantra Kirtan as the surest means to liberation for men of this Kali Yuga. He has Ashrams at Mahamilan Math, Amherst Street, Kolkata, at Puri, at Rishikesh and other sacred places of India. Once when Baba Omkarnath was in his Ashram at Rishikesh, Swamiji went there to pay his respects. From then on a profoundly tender and solicitous relationship has developed between the two. Swamiji is so eager to meet him that sometimes he goes up to Uttarakashi for his Darshan.

Once when the revered Babaji Maharaj visited Sivanandashram with his party of devotees, Swamiji had gone abroad. He learnt from Swami Asheshananda about Swamiji's foreign tour and handed him over a long stick, which bore the nice carving of the monosyllable Om in Sanskrit, from top to bottom. Baba Omkarnath requested that the stick be presented on his behalf to Swamiji Maharaj on his return from abroad. A month later when Swamiji returned to the Ashram and received the stick, he narrated to Asheshanandaji the background of the presentation. A year earlier Baba had come to the Ashram carrying a long stick in his hand bearing the emblems of Om from top to bottom. Swamiji was impressed by its beautiful workmanship and expressed his appreciation. Baba immediately wanted to present the same to Swamiji. But Swamiji declined the offer by saying that he already had a number of sticks,



With Worshipful Swami Ramdas and Mother Krishna Bai
Third from L. to R. standing behind Swami Ramdas



With Revered Swami Sharadananda

Third from L. to R. Swami Premananda, Swami Sharadananda, Swami Chidananda

and the Baba had only that one to use on his walks. However, Baba remembered Swamiji's appreciation, ordered for a similar stick and decided to personally offer it to Swamiji on his subsequent visit. Swamiji has preserved that stick in his little drawing room as a token of Baba's Prem.

It was because of this personal love that the Baba consented to inaugurate the twenty-fourth All-India Divine Life Conference at Delhi. He was also gracious to attend the Silver Jubilee of the Divine Life Conference (25th Conference) where he was so much filled with divine love that he entered into Bhava Samadhi there itself. Swamiji who was presiding over the conference upheld Babaji as the very "Nama Swarup", and as one of the seniormost God-realised saints of modern India.

Swamiji has a similar high regard for another leading spiritual light of South India shining in Anandashram, at Kanhangad. Right from his early Purvashram life he had been in deep spiritual attachment with Anandashram, because of its glorious founder Swami Ramdas. He used to frequently visit the Ashram and hence came in close touch with the holy Mother Krishna Bai, the spiritual successor of the beloved Papa, Swami Ramdas. In the Summer of 1962, Swamiji stayed in this Ashram for some time during his Parivrajaka life. It was then that Swamiji became closely known to Pujya Mataji, Mother Krishna Bai.

Swamiji considers Swami Ramdas and Mother Krishna Bai as one. He has visited Anandashram to pay his homage to the Mother time and again and has had soulful Satsangs with her every time. The Mother, too, holds him in high esteem and expresses great regard and affection for him. One day towards the end of 1976 Swamiji hurried to Anandashram to meet the Mother who was ailing since November. It was touching to see how in spite of her being bedridden she paid constant attention to each and every minute detail of arrangement

for Swamiji's comforts. Such is the regard illumined souls bear towards one another. Swamiji brackets her with Ma Anandamayi. In his own words—"Mother Krishna Bai is just like the affectionate Anandamayi Ma with no other parallel that I know of."

Most of the eminent saints visiting Rishikesh are invited by Swamiji to the Sivanandashram. Swami Sharanananandaji Maharaj was one such Siddha Mahatma who used to come to Gita Bhavan almost every year during the Summer Yatra season and deliver his holy talks for a month. During this period Swami Sharanananandaji never went out for any other programme. But as a token of his special love for Swami Chidanandaji, he always visited Sivanandashram for a day or two and gave his discourses and blessings to the Sadhaks there. He was one of the earliest inspirers of Swami Premanandaji Maharaj, the then Secretary of the Divine Life Society. Therefore, he was doubly happy to visit the Ashram and join Chidanandaji and other Swamijis in elevating Satsangs. Sharanananandaji Maharaj also used to meet Chidanandaji at the Samyama Saptahas of Sri Ma Anandamayi. Swamiji considered his Mahasamadhi on the 25th December, 1974 as creating a vacuum in the world of saints.

The celebrated Samyama Saptaha of Ma Anandamayi was again the occasion when Swamiji met Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj of Brindavan, the celebrated exponent of Srimad Bhagavatam. Akhandanandaji pays homage to Swamiji as the very incarnation of humility. Once while addressing an audience in Haridwar he said "Swami Chidananda is the very embodiment of humility. If anybody wishes to behold humility incarnate and learn to be humble, he should approach Chidanandaji. In this age it is rare to find a saint with such remarkable humility." Swami Sharanananandaji had similar views about Swamiji. Humility is, indeed, the hall-mark of Swamiji's

With Worshipful Thakur Sitaramdas Omkarnath

In the Company of Revered Baya Baba

personality, a quality that singles him out in the world of saints as the very embodiment of "Amanitva."

With Gurudev's contemporaries he behaves like a student. He obeys them as he would have done his Master. To such Mahatmas like Sri Swami Sukadevanandaji Maharaj and Sri Swami Bhajananandaji Maharaj of Paramartha Niketan and Sri Swami Omkarji Maharaj of Santi Ashram, his worshipful behaviour is reverential. There was a close bond of spiritual love and divine fellowship in God between Swami Sivananda and Swami Omkar. Therefore, Swami Chidanandaji very often visited Omkarji's Ashram at Totapalli hills in Andhra Pradesh to pay his regards.

Once, on an Ekadasi day, Swamiji was a guest at Santi Ashram. It so happened that on that day Swami Omkar sent some dishes through Jnanesvari Mataji with a request that Swamiji should partake of at least some items from the same. Swamiji who does not take any solid food on such days smiled and to the surprise of his own immediate attendant Sadhaks there, started taking the food from the dishes as Prasad. Next day, however, he fasted again. The subtle Vichara displayed in the act is noteworthy. In obedience to the wishes of a senior Mahatma, first of all he meekly submits and violates his own discipline. But the very next day he voluntarily imposes the same discipline on himself again.

The Tapobhumi of Gurudev has been attracting a good number of saints from far and near. They are primarily attracted by the divine personality of Swamiji. Everyone feels that the vacuum caused by the Mahasamadhi of the Master has been ably filled by his spiritual successor. After the Mahasamadhi of Gurudev, Jagadacharya Swami Naradananda of Moksha Ashram, Naimisharanya, used to visit the Ashram often. He used to declare that Swami Chidanandaji was "Gangaki Dhara". Sometimes he used to refer to him as "Premki Ganga". Like Mother Ganga he is cool and sweet, moving

deep and silent, nourishing the vast stretches of this Punya Bhumi. Naradanandaji says—"You have lost Sivananda. But you have found Sivananda in Chidananda. In broadmindedness and selflessness Chidananda is the same as Sivananda. Chidanandaji never took lessons on Vedantic texts. But his discourses are filled with Vedic wisdom. He is Veda Swarupa."

Swamiji never misses the opportunity, if any, of meeting a saint. Public stature, expansion of an institution, name of the sect or number of disciples are matters of no concern to him. A saint, whether he be in a Math or in a forest, in public life or in Sannyas, is equally alluring to him. In this manner he has met Acharya Vinoba Bhave at Paunar and offered him salutations, as he would do to any senior Sannyasin.

In the course of his many tours in Orissa, he used to hear about the mystic saint, Sri Sri Baya Baba, the Namacharya, who was a Mouni Sadhak for more than twelve years. Baya Baba is the spiritual successor of Babaji Sri Ram Das Maharaj and founder of the Kalpataru Ashram at Bhubaneswar. The meeting between Babaji and Swamiji took place in interesting circumstances. With the birth centenary of Ram Das Babaji fast approaching, the disciples of Baya Baba were keen to arrange the visit of some truly outstanding spiritual personality to the Ashram on that occasion. Baya Baba also very lovingly and graciously desired the same. The providential arrangement which had already been made was, as it were, quite known to him. On his arrival at Bhubaneswar from Mahabalipuram, Swamiji suddenly proceeded directly from the Airport to meet the indrawn saint at his Kalpataru Ashram. The two saints literally lay prostrate upon the ground in salutation before each other and remained together in silent communion for a long, long period. At the end Babaji earnestly and humbly requested Swamiji to grace his Ashram at Kendrapara to inaugurate the birth centenary celebrations of his holy master Sri Baba Ram Das

Maharaj. Swamiji gave his consent happily and came there again for the inaugural function. At the end of the programme, as usual, Swamiji came to Babaji and in his habitually polite way begged Baba's grace. At this, the elderly Babaji who was then almost bedridden stood up in reverential gratitude, despite physical strain, and literally bowed down at Swamiji's feet. That was Baba's answer to Swamiji's prayer.

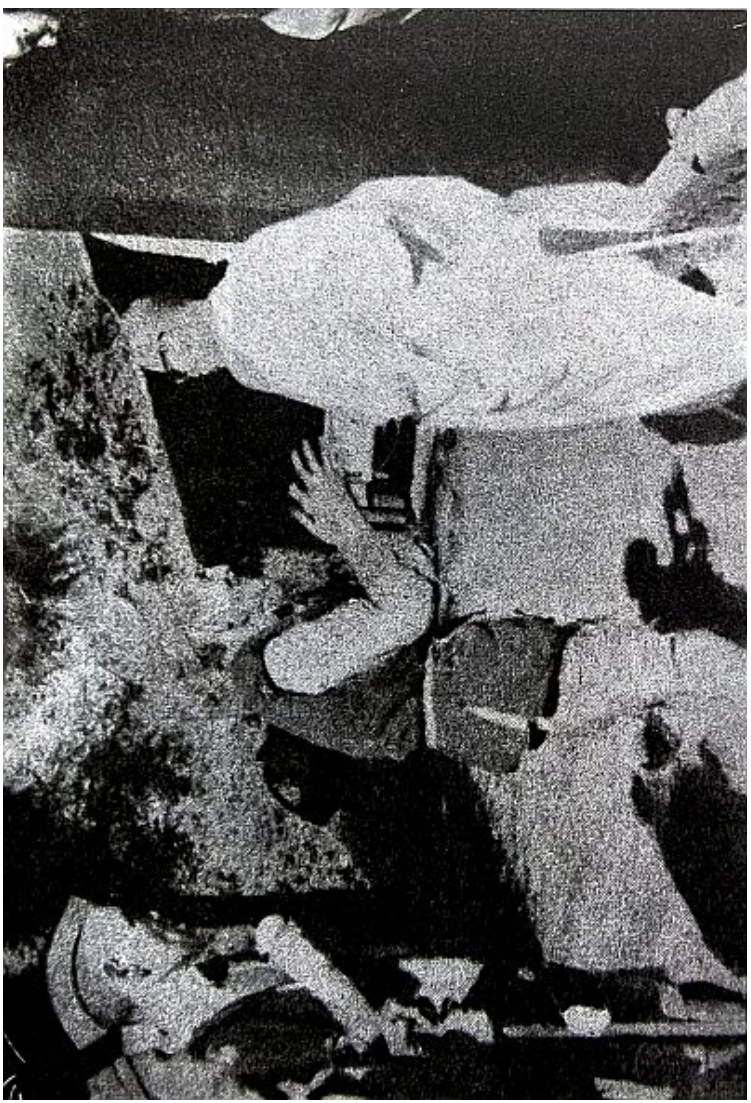
Thus does Chidananda shine in the company of saints who bestow upon him their immeasurable love and regard. Recognition from saints is, indeed, the most significant testimony to a holy man's attainment. Chidananda neither desires nor wants any such recognition. Yet, for countless aspirants, his place of distinction in the world of saints is most meaningful and instructive. He is an ideal Sannyasin to the mendicants and monks, a friend of the down-trodden to the practical philanthropists, a profound and practical Vedantin to the realised Jnanis, and a Para Bhakta to countless devotees.

CHAPTER EIGHT

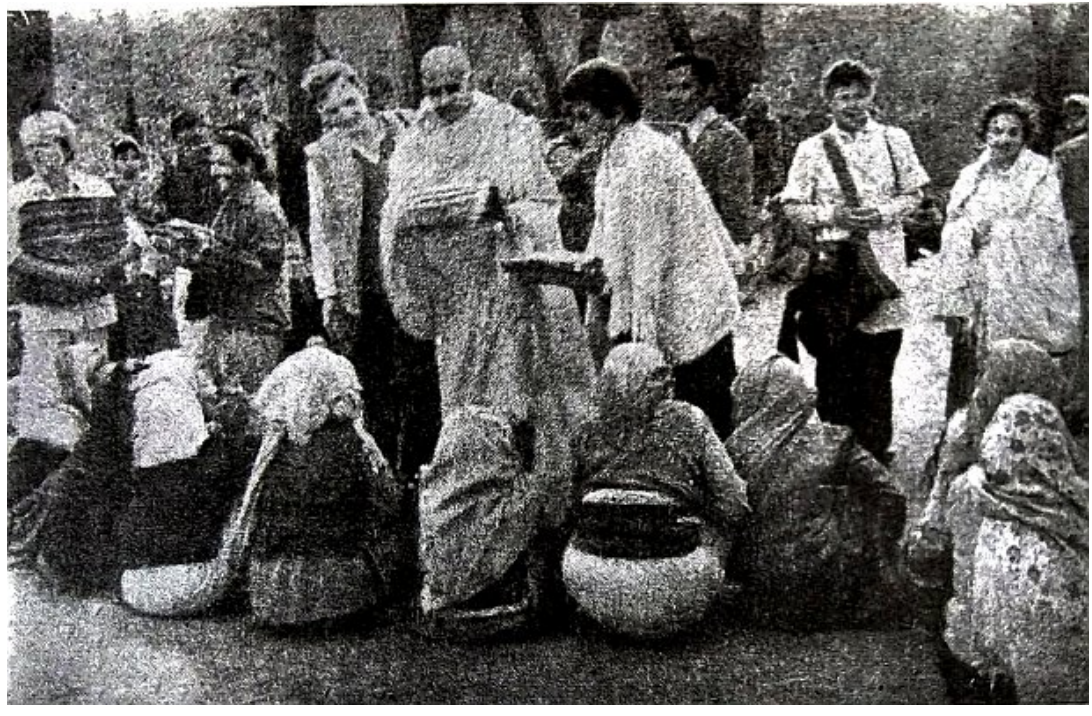
FRIEND OF THE DOWNTRODDEN

Chidananda lives to serve. He has devoted his entire career on this earth plane to a ceaseless service of the Lord's creatures. He is a lofty redeemer of the fallen and a solicitous friend of the afflicted. Compassion for all living beings springs in an inexhaustible measure from the divine bosom of this born saint. To the unfortunate lepers of Rishikesh and its surroundings he has been a veritable saviour. His kindness and sympathy for these fellow-men who have been condemned, cursed and rejected even by their own relations, will remain an inspiring lesson in service and charity for all humanity. There have been a good many spiritual leaders and saints who have illumined the paths of the seekers by courting personal deprivations. But there have been few among them who continue all their life to address themselves to compassionate physical care of the disabled and the diseased with such complete dedication as Chidananda. A Buddha, a Jesus, a Gandhi, a Damien, a Chidananda—such are the few among the great ones who, having realised the supreme unity in the midst of all diversities, transcend the limits of social and human taste and embrace the worst sinner, the most hated and afflicted creatures on earth.

The extraordinary compassion and care shown by Chidananda from his very early days to these unfortunate beings has already been touched upon in an earlier chapter. It was a profound conviction of universal fellowship, spiritual unity and cosmic love that led him to serve the sick and the lowly, not merely among men but among the birds, beasts and insects that move and crawl around unnoticed. It was, therefore, natural that even when he renounced his hearth and home and came to the bank of the Ganga for seclusion, silence and



Friend of the Downtrodden



Presenting clothes to the inmates of the
Brahmapuri Leper Colony

Sadhana, he could not turn a deaf ear to the cries of agony that rent the air around his new home. Instead of looking upon it as a distraction or growing a `Vedantic' indifference towards it, he took to compassionate service as a dynamic Sadhana and worship, as a practical manifestation of universal love. He was deeply moved to see large numbers of lepers dragging their miserable life in the neighbouring locality to Sivananda Ashram, deserted equally by a hostile Nature and indifferent human beings. Their misery was, indeed, indescribable. They managed to keep the body and soul together on whatever little was charitably offered to them on the wayside by the pilgrims. With the disease many other kinds of bodily and psychological afflictions had come in. Many of them suffered from a variety of other ailments. Most of them for instance, had stomach troubles. They often had attacks of Pneumonia and Tuberculosis. In unbearably chilly weather they used to retire into some old wretched huts by the side of the mountain stream of the Chandrabhaga. Most of them preferred to keep lying by the roadside as long as it was possible.

During his habitual evening walks Swamiji saw the line of lepers begging by the roadside. Amelioration of their lot very soon became his predominant concern. They did not expect anything from a Sannyasin in saffron robe. But the young Sannyasin became their greatest friend and saviour.

Early in 1943 when Swamiji was in charge of the Sivananda Charitable Dispensary, the opportunity for giving the lepers some meaningful service came to him automatically. During those days even hospitals used to be forbidden territories for the poor lepers. The only medical attention available for these poor people was a little tincture of iodine given to them by a Vaidya dispensing Ayurvedic medicine in a State-owned dispensary under Tehri Durbar. That was all. It was all very painful to the soft-hearted Swamiji, and he started giving full attention to their health and himself carried

medicines to their huts. Once the lepers found that there was an angel among men bringing them love, relief and hope—a doctor of their body, mind and soul—that medicines and advice could be obtained from the affectionate Brahmachari in charge of the Sivananda dispensary, they started coming there in large numbers. Thus Sivananda Charitable Dispensary became a busy clinic for lepers. The generous Maharaja of Tehri had been supplying first-aid kits and dressing materials for the lepers. That was the only organised medical aid that the lepers had got by that time. Now Swamiji with his healing hand appeared before them as a veritable God; to Swamiji the Lord Himself appeared in the form of these afflicted patients. The humanitarian engagement, therefore, was truly a service of the Lord Almighty. The eyes of Swamiji spoke of his compassion and his face radiated deep maternal love while he was engaged in dressing the open ulcers of patients in advanced stages of leprosy. Swamiji used to be available to them at a very early hour at the dispensary so that they could be free for collection of alms and also the other patients coming to the dispensary might not feel psychologically disturbed on account of their presence. His service of lepers in the dispensary evoked awe and admiration of even great medical experts. Major General A.N. Sharma, the then Director of Medical Services of the Indian Army, was amazed to notice the way in which Swamiji cured the patients and observed that the young Brahmachari was no ordinary man.

There was a Punjabi monk suffering from dangerous advanced form of leprosy. He kept rolling on the road for some days and then requested a teacher of the local school one day to carry him to the Sivanandashram. Being aided by the teacher the patient managed to reach the gateway of the Ashram when it was already 10 p.m. The night Satsang was about to be over when the news came to Swamiji that a patient was waiting for him. With a torch light in hand Swamiji walked out to the spot

where the patient was lying and saw his pitiable condition. Immediately he carried him to the verandah of the Yoga Sadhana Kutir and sent word to Gurudev seeking his permission to accommodate the patient inside the Ashram. The Master himself felt overwhelmed with a sense of pity, and granted the necessary permission.

Having obtained Gurudev's consent Chidananda now put up a comfortable thatched hut behind the Yoga Museum building for the leper to reside during his care and treatment. Swamiji then began nursing the patient with such love and care as hardly even a mother could surpass. In front of his Kutir he built a cottage for the patient who had taken shelter at his feet. He worked for fifteen days and succeeded in removing the insects from the patient's body by applying chloroform, turpentine and other medicines. He dressed the wounds with his own hand. He was happy to be assisted by Sri Surya Narayan of Puttur in this great service. He carried on this Seva for months together, combining the roles of friend, doctor, nurse, cook and sweeper. He cleaned the excreta of the unfortunate man. When the barber refused to cut his hair, he himself did the job. He had to feed him eight or ten times a day according to a strict schedule. After all, the patient was no other than Narayana in the form of the destitute and therefore, whatever was necessary for him was done for him by the humble votary with the greatest care, love and reverence.

Late in the evening one day there was a storm in which the patient's cottage was destroyed. Some provisional arrangement had to be made. But who was there to look after this helpless being at that odd hour! The compassionate Swamiji—his only friend—came out of his Kutir in the middle of the storm and carried the patient, coir cot and all other things into a covered space under the projecting back verandah of the Yoga Museum building. Next day he made the little space tidy and then had a fresh cottage built for the man. Thereafter, again

the silent Seva continued like a stream in its normal and natural flow. There was no bustle, no sense of self-congratulation, no sense of weariness—it was done with the spirit of Karma Yoga in absolute serenity. Sometimes the patient expressed desire to eat some sweets. Swamiji prepared for him those sweets according to his instructions and served him affectionately himself after administering a refreshing bath. Ignoring the ridicule of others and overcoming all manner of difficulties he finally succeeded in curing the patient.

Gurudev commented that Swamiji had wrought a miracle. The diseased monk, who was given up as a lost case by everyone else was now able to walk about and take his bath himself. Gurudev said with great appreciation, "Chidanandaji has given him a new lease of life through his loving service." He added that he himself could have hardly served the patient with such fullness of devotion. While Swamiji was immersed in the worship of the Lord in this destitute, Gurudev once drew the attention of Pannalalji, a senior devotee, to see for himself how Swamiji was converting work into worship. When Swamiji was preparing to accompany Gurudev for the All-India tour in September 1950, the patient himself suggested that he would prefer to return to his monastery at Amritsar with the help of an escort. Swamiji paid him money towards his travelling expenses and thus completed his Seva with a sense of deep satisfaction. This miraculous cure that he effected has been an oft-quoted example in the saga of service of the Sivanandashram. Gurudev himself referred a number of times to this extraordinary service of Swamiji in course of his lectures in the All-India Tour.

After his return from the All-India Tour Swamiji further intensified his service of the lepers. It was because of his protracted efforts that some land could be secured and the leper colony of Brahmapuri could be constructed.

One day in 1952 there came heavy rains and the Chandrabhaga burst its banks. A number of huts in the nearby Muni-ki-reti leper colony were washed away. Early in the morning next day all the lepers came to the gates of Sivanandashram. Chidananda was once again their valiant protector. He approached Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji for his advice. He felt that some permanent solution to the problem had to be found out. First of all fresh hot food was arranged for them. Then he went out and contacted the district officers at Narendra Nagar. He also organised a meeting of the general public including persons of Rishikesh as well as Swargashram and drew the attention of all concerned to the acute problem of the lepers. It was decided in the meeting that a Kustha Nivarak Samiti or Leprosy Relief Association should be created. The District Magistrate was the Ex-Officio Chairman of this association; the Chairman of the town, the Health Officer, Swamiji himself, the Head of the Gita Bhavan, Secretary of Kali Kamaliwala Kshetra and a few others were elected members. Thus, it was the driving force of Swamiji's personality that drew the attention of the general public and the local district authorities. Thanks to his efforts, the first Leprosy Relief Association of the district of Tehri-Garhwal was formed.

Funds were collected for the distribution of ration to the lepers. The condition was that the lepers should not have to come to the road side for securing their means of livelihood. The Samiti decided to send them five miles up in the Himalayas to live at a place called Brahmapuri, which was specially cleared for them. There were a number of problems for the new leper colony. The existing quarters had to be cleaned, hospital facilities had to be ensured and self- supporting rehabilitation projects had to be launched. Swamiji's efforts at the Government level brought the first success: the district authorities obtained the services of a trained paramedical worker in leprosy relief for the colony. At this, the joy and gratitude of the patients knew no

bounds. Such a thing had never before happened to them; that a person would be appointed to take care of them was an extraordinary event. No wonder, they cried, in wonder and gratitude—"It is an angel that has come down for us." The person who came was, indeed, a noble and dedicated selfless worker, Sri Ravindra Kumar Mittal by name, deputed by the Gandhi Memorial Leprosy Relief Foundation, Wardha.

Swamiji had struggled and succeeded in making people look at the problem as their own. Work of this order could have been easily overwhelming for most social workers. In Swamiji's case, again, one should further realise that he had come to the Ashram throwing away all else in life for his own spiritual Sadhana. The dislocation to this usual schedule can be easily imagined. But what would have distressed or overwhelmed most social workers or spiritual seekers left him uncomplaining, serene and undaunted as ever. He took the entire thing as God's worship, and to one established at that high spiritual level, no engagement could really be a distraction. Under the leadership of Swamiji necessary steps were taken to start the new lepers' colony at Brahmapuri and in 1959 the lepers were shifted to their new residential shelter.

Swamiji's service of these unfortunate souls evoked profound admiration in a good number of foreign devotees. The impact was intensified after his visit to the New World under Gurudev's instruction. His talks on selfless service created a powerful impact on some blessed souls like mother Sita Frenkel and mother Simonetta and others. Mother Sita was the first to come forward to donate generously and liberally for this great <169>Yajna" of selfless service. Mother Simonetta who was an internationally famous woman earning plenty of money as a leading fashion designer, was suddenly inspired to devote the rest of her life to the service of the destitute when she heard Swamiji's speech in Paris. Swamiji's talk had an electrifying effect on her; it was like

a blow on the chest, she said. In her own words "Such vibrations.... I had never known anything like it before—never. From that moment I was his."

While Swamiji was at California on his lecture tour she was on a business trip to New York. On learning of Swamiji's schedule she cancelled all her press interviews and television programmes and flew out to join him in San Francisco. This meeting with Swamiji brought about a remarkable change in her. She gave up her earlier profession and came to Sivanandashram to devote her life to the service of the lepers at Brahmapuri and of refugees, of the destitute and orphans. She has been working for them ever since, with whole-hearted dedication and compassion. She says, "I can do it only because of my devotion to Swamiji. Swamiji has helped me very much in my acceptance of facts and in my relations with people. I do it as my Sadhana."

From the very beginning of his stay in Sivanandashram Swamiji was not only in the habit of looking after patients who came to the Ashram dispensary, but also he roamed the countryside in search of sick persons in need of help and tended them. There was no proper communication, no hospital in the surrounding hill area. People used to die for want of treatment. To them Swamiji was a veritable saviour. He reached almost every home and distributed medicines lovingly to all those who needed. He arranged to build huts for the lepers who were driven out by the people in the villages. The patients had no means of subsistence and no accommodation. Swamiji used to be by their side, feeding them, giving medicines and dressing their wounds. It was, therefore, no wonder that he attained celebrity in the locality as a noble soul, and henceforth he could easily get things done in distant corners of Tehri-Garhwal in alleviating the distress of the poor and sick people.

Years later when mother Simonetta dedicated herself for Seva and Sadhana, Swamiji left the Brahmapuri colony almost entirely in her loving hands. This dedicated lady introduced weaving looms and engaged the patients, who were cured, in productive work. Swamiji now and then goes there on a visit to meet his leper friends, to give them a lesson on ideal living and to sweeten their mouth with some Prasad. When Swamiji noticed that local help for Brahmapuri was inadequate he made an appeal in the pages of "The Divine Life" in 1968 for voluntary contributions. Devotees and philanthropists responded to the call and the relief work gained momentum with the new fund. Under Swamiji's inspiration the Divine Life Society collaborated with the District Leprosy Relief Association in bringing aid and relief to the afflicted ones.

Meanwhile the problem of leprosy relief was depicted by Mr. Ruth Yeb-Wallee and Mr. Richardson in the Sunday Times of London in 1963. In 1973 Mr. R. Prawer Jhabvala also wrote about the problem and the relief brought by the services of Swamiji and other dedicated persons in the Asia Magazine and Imprint. Publicity thus given by these journalists had the desired effect. Mr. Francis Harris, Director of the British Leprosy Relief Organisation, came to Rishikesh in October, 1973, and discussed with Swamiji about the best way in which the fund collected through the Organisation could be utilised. He was of the opinion that the amount collected by the British Leprosy Relief Organisation could be donated only to an institution and not a person. Mother Simonetta suggested that the Institution be named Swami Chidananda Leprosy Relief Fund and thus in the name of Swamiji the philanthropic institution took its birth. Leprosy relief activity of the Divine Life Society is all done through this fund now. It is known briefly as SCLRF.

On all special days at the Ashram, specially on Sivananda Jayanti and Chidananda Jayanti days,

Swamiji with a batch of volunteers drives to all the three leper colonies at Brahmapuri, Dhalwala and Lakshmanjhula. He distributes sweets and fruits and gives presentation in cash as Dakshina. Sometimes he carries ration, clothing etc. for them in the different colonies. It is due to this care and attention that gradually the Dhalwala colony came to be provided with all its basic requirements. During the later part of 1973, Simonetta, Pierre Reyniers, Hans and Sita Frenkel rendered great help to alleviate the distress of these unfortunate people. Subsequently Mrs. and Mr. Brel of Brussels, Belgium, came forward with some contributions to this altar of selfless service. Simonetta started there an industrial unit for spinning and weaving which is now producing carpets, woolen sweaters, mufflers and such other items. She then started there the Chidananda Leprosy Cure Clinic. The contributions of M/S. Thiruvalluvar Handlooms and Sri Ram Products of Rajapalayam, the free provision of streptomycin injections by Dr. N.V. Suchak of Bombay, Dr. S.J. Ruchani of Adipur and help of Sri Maganlal Purushottom of Bombay have gone a long way for the healthy development of the colonies.

Yet another landmark of the leprosy relief programme launched by Swamiji is the establishment of a dispensary at the Lakshmanjhula colony in 1975. This has given great relief to the patients who had previously to walk all the way to the Ashram Hospital. Despite all these developments and improvement, Swamiji is eager to further improve their condition. The appalingly poor nutrition, without an improvement of which the fate of five million lepers of India will not really show any tangible change, is the main focus of his attention there. It is undoubtedly the spiritual force of his personality that has enabled the Divine Life Society to render the memorable humanitarian service to the brethren of the local leper colonies at an expense of thousands of rupees per year.

Swamiji's service of lepers is a beautiful expression of his divine spirit. The President of the Divine Life Society and one of the greatest spiritual leaders of the present times who is constantly besieged by numberless devotees from all stations and walks of life for Darshan and guidance, still, some how, finds time to visit the lowliest of the lowly, to speak a kind word to each and to care for their physical comforts. There is the story of Giridhari, for whom history may not have any space to spare. But in the history of humanitarianism, of true fellowship and nobility of spirit this would be recorded in letters of gold. Giridhari was just a poor patient of Dhalwala. He had no fingers, no nose, and no legs. His wife too was a leper. He was unable to move and beg for his own livelihood. He was rejected by everybody. But Swamiji offered him his unfailing care. The mercy of the Master on him was boundless and it was apparently without any special reason. But the greater the affliction, the greater is the mercy of God and godmen.

Swamiji looked after Giridhari more than what he could have perhaps done for his dearest disciple. For twenty years or more the patient was unable to walk and Swamiji was sending him food and looking after him in every possible way all those years. Giridhari was always the first one in his consideration. For instance, when he was about to leave the Ashram on his long global tour, and was surrounded by the Ashramites offering him good wishes, suddenly his thoughts went out to the poor patient to whom he had been attendant, friend and parent for years. He visited Giridhari's hut and took farewell of the disconsolate man with the solemn promise that he would remember him daily. The poor man offered his prayers with folded hands and elicited a promise that Swamiji would certainly return to him before his death. With that Swamiji left, but he always kept the poor man in mind. He used to send the best available medicines and small little presents every now and then from far-off America to the poor little hut of Giridhari.

When Giridhari's death was drawing near, he was agonised with the thought that his Master who nursed him for decades was not there beside him during his last days and that he might not have a Darshan of the Holy Master before his death. With such thoughts he developed total contempt for his physical frame and stopped taking food. He covered his body with his little dirty blanket and kept lying on the ground. People thought that he was already dead. Mother Yvonne Lebeau, who chanced to find him in that wretched condition, did her best to preserve his life. The patient was so adamant that he refused to take even orange juice or grape juice. But the moment he was given to understand that Swamiji would return soon and that if he wished to remain alive to see Swamiji he had to take at least the fruit juice, he at once yielded. Mother Lebeau arranged for him a photo of Swamiji, properly framed and garlanded. Giridhari kept his vigil, praying and weeping for the holy Darshan. Then the miracle did really happen. His prayers were answered. No one believed that Giridhari could live till the return of Swamiji. But it so happened that Swamiji came back to the Ashram two and a half months before the scheduled date. When he came to know about Giridhari's state, he, who had untiringly nursed the patient for twenty years, was now keen on preparing him for a peaceful exit. He purchased new blanket and went to meet Giridhari in his hut at Dhalwala. Mother Simonetta was then present by his side. Swamiji softly said to Giridhari, "You can leave your body now. You can go in peace." Thus beholding the Holy Master of unbounded compassion seated beside him, the fortunate Giridhari remained cheerful and serene for some time and then left his mortal coil. He was wrapped in that little cotton blanket and his body was burnt with the chanting of Divine Names.

There are numerous such cases of Swamiji's moving service and love of helpless people. Another Dhalwala leper, whose wife had deserted him, was left helpless

with his two children. It so happened that Swamiji came to know of the children's misery on parting from their mother and the consequent distress of the poor father. So he brought those children to the Ashram, fed and clothed them and then handed them over to a lady doctor who became their Mataji. Examples such as this are legion.

Once a year when the joyous festival of Holi arrives, the brethren of the three leper colonies come to the Ashram dancing, singing and beating their drums to the accompani- ment of a tumultuous shout every few moments—"Chidanand Bhagavan Ki Jai". They come, meet their friend and saviour and offer their loving prostrations to the one who has meant so much to each of them. The saint in his turn comes out to them with equal ardour, greets them and offers them sweets. The love and the jollity, the radiance on the face of the saint and the gratitude and warmth on the faces of the lepers, the fully free and uninhibited exchange constitute an uplifting experience of joy to the spectators.

Thus the unfortunate and afflicted souls of Uttarakhand found peace and shelter in him. The compassionate Swamiji was not only their physician but an affectionate mother, a stern father, a helpful friend and above all, a redeemer and saviour to each one of them.

THE GREAT AWAKENER

Cheer up. Be bold. I am by thy side. I dwell within thee as part of the eternal Antaryamin, the Supreme Indweller; with whom I am ever one in spirit.—This is the thrilling assurance of Chidananda to the countless devotees all over the globe struggling to move in his care from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from the mortal to the Imperishable. He is a cosmic friend, a world teacher, a unique inspirer and a dynamic divine messenger, improving the lot of humanity through his infinite compassion, radiant purity, soulful Bhajans, and the solemn admonitions which constitute a sort of electrifying shock-treatment to the materialists of the modern age.

Right from 1949, when he donned the ochre garb and assumed the office of the General Secretary of the Divine Life Society, he has given himself entirely to the colossal task of awakening the masses from inertia and heedlessness, and making them develop the right resolution and tread the right path for attainment of Self-realisation. The story of his epic efforts as a great awakener began rather innocently. As has been told earlier, Sivananda one day sent for him and asked him to proceed to Patna[17] in Bihar to inaugurate a Branch of the

17 *Going over to Patna he came to know that one of the dedicated organisers of the Branch Mrs. A.K. Sinha was lying with high fever. He paid her a visit and to the great solace and surprise of everybody by the very touch of his healing hands she was absolutely normal the next day and took part in the proceedings with her usual zeal. The visit of Swamiji furnished a wonderful experience to the vast concourse of people who came to the Conference from far and near. The young Swamiji was so inspiring that the Governor of Bihar, His Excellency Mr. M.S. Aney who went to inaugurate the function was profoundly moved and invited him to the Governor's House with great reverence and accorded him a very special honour.*

Divine Life Society. It was only a simple mission incidentally thrust on his shoulders. But his visit had such electrifying impact on the masses that thereafter he was to have no respite. As the years went by, more and more people began vociferously demanding his gracious attention and he has continued to remain an itinerant messenger of God ever since.

Swamiji's Patna visit, which ended as an extensive tour of Bihar, was followed by the epochal All-India Tour in the company of the Master. Seekers all over India soon realised Chidananda's greatness and came to look forward to hearing his sermons and instructions as priceless things. At the Parliament of Religions at Rishikesh in 1953, he played the role of the prime mover on all the sessions. Through the persuasive power of his logic and intense spiritual fervour he brought home to the listeners the fundamental message that religion alone can unite humanity. Observing the impact he registered on the masses, the Holy Master felt the necessity of sending him out more and more frequently to do spiritual service of the people. He was the one to be always deputed as his personal representative to preside over the various Divine Life Conferences[18].

When the eighth All-India Divine Life Conference was held at Kolkata, Swamiji was brought down by the Holy Master from Badrinarayan where he had been on pilgrimage and asked to proceed there to elevate the masses. His very first words of address at the Conference, calling the assembled seekers 'Visible manifestations of the one ever-perfect, ever-pure, all-blissful Supreme Spirit, the One Almighty Being' sent

18 *Gurudev had conceived the idea of spiritual Conference as a modern need for mass awakening. He announced that a Divine Life Conference in Kali Yuga tantamounts to a hundred Rajasuya Yajnas or Soma Yajnas. Being inspired by the Master, Dr. V.S. Mani organised the First All-India Divine Life Conference at Villupuram in the end of 1939. Subsequently six such Conferences were held at Salem, Venkatagiri, Rajahmundry, Rishikesh, Hyderabad and again at Salem.*

out a wave of thrill as had done Vivekananda's words to the audience at Chicago. It is not so much the words as the palpable spiritual force and divine grace behind them that at once produced a magnificent impact. Solemn, radiant and penetrating, Swamiji went on to clarify that the prime purpose of the Divine Life Conference was to produce in the hearts and minds of men waves of Divine Bhav, the sublime spirit of Atmic unity, universal oneness, devotion, brotherhood and love. The Conference had nothing limitingly institutional about it. He held that it should be a springboard for designing a glorious new vision for the world of today that is rent by conflict and confusion. It was to bring forth a new humanity perennially oriented towards spiritual advancement.

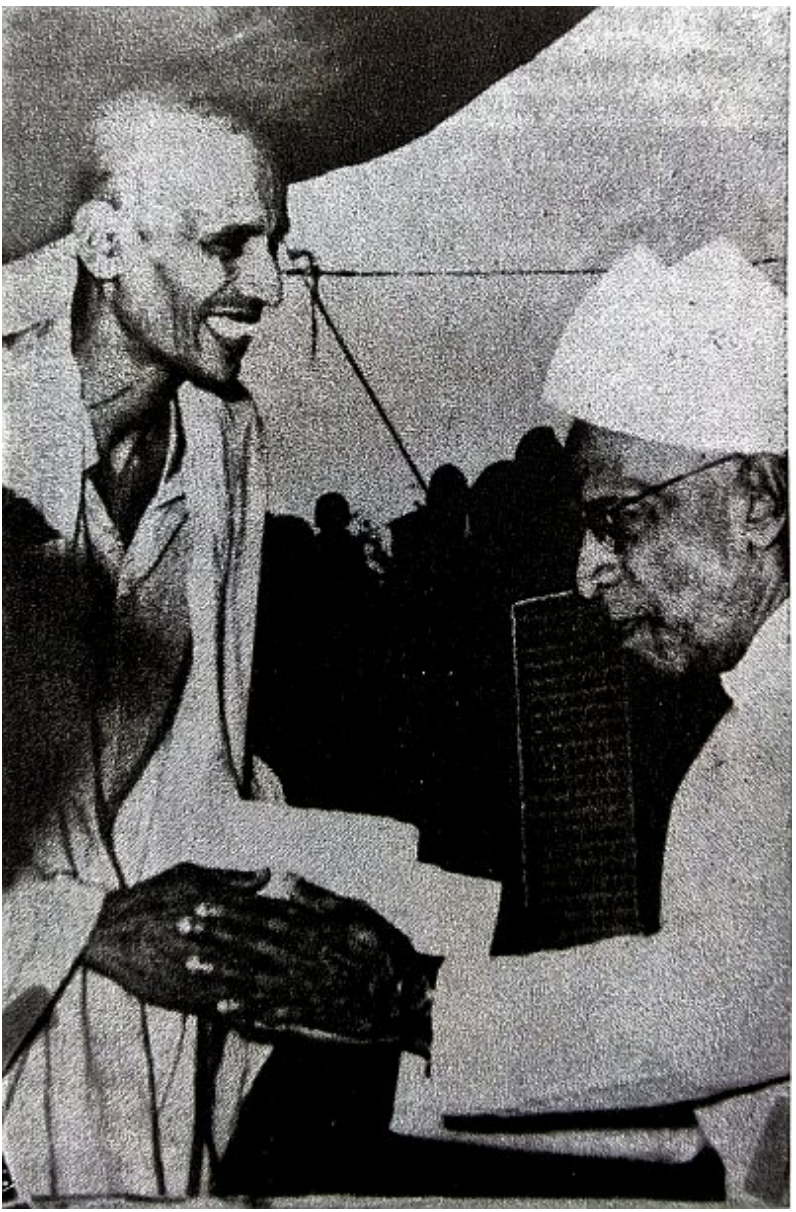
In his elevating discourses Swamiji applied himself to the task of impressing upon his listeners the necessity and ways of bringing about the evolution in the human character by helping it annihilate its lower, impure, egoistic self and realise the higher divine nature within. He held that all things in the universe manifest their true natures. Man alone was the offender. Man, the crown of God's creation, His supreme handiwork, endowed with the grand faculty of intellect, was not true to his nature. His intellect was prostituted for self-aggrandisement. He had made himself the slave of his sensual urges and converted this world into a vale of sorrow and suffering. The garden of God had been desecrated. Swamiji made it clear to one and all that Divine Life was not a mystery. He said, "Know the Divine Life to be selflessness, and Self-realisation, service of man and worship of God." He wished that the Conference may carry this message into every home not only within the great city of Kolkata hallowed by the memory of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda but also in all parts of the world.

His fervent message produced an indelible impress on the people of Kolkata. The impact could be seen even a number of years later when the Silver Jubilee of the

Divine Life Conference was organised at Kolkata in 1974. Tens of thousands of seekers then rallied round the banner of Divine Life, unfurled by Chidananda. Saints like Thakur Sitaram Das Omkarnath, Swami Vedavyasananda, Kavi Yogi Suddhananda Bharati and Swami Chinmayananda graced the platform as a mark of their personal love and regard for Swamiji. Omkar Baba described Chidananda as the visible Sivananda and Vedavyasananda characterised him as a modern Vivekananda. In his discourse Swamiji urged upon all an integrated movement for God-realisation. He held that no part of life should be allowed to hamper this movement. He showed how every bit of man's action could be a further step towards God. This has to be the religion of today, he affirmed—not rejection of this life, but transformation of it.

The upsurge of interest in Swamiji now spread from Bengal to Gujarat. In various spiritual Conferences in that State over a period of ten years, Swamiji applied himself to the task of bringing about spiritual regeneration and social amity. His impact on the masses at Patan and Rajkot, in particular, was admirable. His divine personality attracted other towering spiritual leaders like Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Dwaraka and Baba Ranchod Das to those functions. That is always the case with Swamiji's Conferences. In awakening the masses to the divine life, Swamiji not only exerts on his own but also liberally draws upon the vast fund of goodwill he has accumulated of other distinguished holy men of the country.

In course of his tour Swamiji has had often to pass through Delhi. The fortunate devotees there are always alert to take the opportunity of meeting him and hearing him whenever possible. Those frequent Satsangs have had a very great influence on the devotees and seekers in the Capital and its neighbourhood.



Being felicitated by
Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, President of India

In conversation with
Sri V.V. Giri, President of India

Being inspired by Swamiji the devotees of Delhi organised the sixteenth All-India Divine Life Conference only a few months after the Mahasamadhi of the Holy Master. Swamiji imparted to them the great lesson that the Guru is never dead and the devotees and seekers on their part realised that the Master continued to work through his chosen successor. They were inspired to erect a building to house the Swami Sivananda Cultural Association and thus perpetuate the sacred memory of Gurudev. On the occasion of its inauguration, Swamiji graced the function in the company of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Justice J.R Mudholkar. When the twentyfourth All-India Divine Life Conference was held there, Swamiji again sanctified the holy premises in the company of revered Omkar Baba and other distinguished men of God. On such occasions Swamiji exerted great spiritual impact on the sophisticated intelligentsia of the capital.

Swamiji visited the Punjab for the first time in 1964 to join the seventeenth All-India Divine Life Conference at Chandigarh. This visit is still remembered by the devotees as one imbued with extraordinary spiritual power. When Swamiji reached Chandigarh, at the station itself he stood motionless and deeply withdrawn for some time offering fervent prayers to the Lord Almighty for the spiritual awakening of the people of the sacred Saptasindhu region. Going to the place of Conference when he stepped out of his vehicle to proceed to the dais, the people felt impelled by a new sense of wonder and fervour. They saw him shining with majesty and serenity of an exalted kind. The atmosphere was at once charged with worshipful emotion. Swamiji greeted all with a sweet smile and Namaskar. All eyes were fixed on him. He sat down immobile for a minute like an image, perfectly indrawn. And, then, as soon as he chanted Om,

peace and quietude appeared to have palpably descended and kept the audience enthralled. On the first day of the Conference, about 8000 men and women had assembled there. On the next day the crowd rapidly swelled to about 15000, all eager to have a glimpse of the saint of Sivanandashram and hear his elevating sermon. It was felt by all that the spiritual fervour generated by Swamiji there was of an extraordinary intensity and inexplicable authority. Swami Nirmal Maharaj of Amritsar, who also participated, himself experienced and commented on this impact.

Similarly, Swamiji's public appearance in 1965 on the platform of the eighteenth All-India Divine Life Conference at Mysore[19] was a memorable one. Fifteen years after the epochal tour of the Master, Swamiji appeared for the first time on a platform in South India as his spiritual successor. The large number of South Indian devotees of the Master who went there were all overwhelmed to find that Chidananda was only Sivananda in a slim, radiant frame. Here the pontiffs of Sankara Pithas of Puri and Dwaraka also very graciously extended their co-operation to His Holiness in the noble task of dissemination of spiritual knowledge. After the Mysore Conference Swamiji participated in several regional Conferences in the State.

Soon after his return to India from the three-year global tour in 1971, Swamiji presided over the twenty second All-India Divine Life Conference at Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh. On the eve of the Conference he was taken in a procession with other saints through the main roads and streets of the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, to the accompaniment of loud chants of the Divine Name. Apart

19 *Seekers of South India had organised a similar Conference in Mysore five years before.*

from a number of saints many distinguished men from the secular field such as His Excellency Khandu Bhai Desai, Governor of Andhra Pradesh, and General Cariappa were deeply impressed by Swamiji's thrilling prayer and elevating discourses. Swamiji called upon the seekers to realise the spiritual secret that God is ours by Divine Right. He gave his clarion call: "Wake up from the sleep of self-forgetfulness; your Sadhana should be simply never to forget the sweet relation with the Lord." In a ringing voice he declared, "God is ever in me. I am ever in God", and then added, "to be divine and to live divinely is natural to you. Be yourself and refuse to be anything other than yourself".

Such simple words of wisdom, saturated with sincere appeal and graciousness, had an incalculable impact on the listeners. Many in the audience felt that the shower of spiritual instruction was not merely refreshing and stimulating, it also directly transmitted Swamiji's divine grace to them. In his concluding address Swamiji cautioned the listeners not to waste the rare human birth which is meant for God-realisation. In a solemn voice Swamiji said, "With every sunrise and sunset time is fleeing. Every moment is passing away. All jubilation is, therefore, misplaced. Enquire—one year has gone away. What have I done? Having attained the rare human birth what am I doing? Swadharma of the river is to flow towards the sea. Swadharma of Jiva is to flow towards the Source, the Paramatma. The great duty of Jivatma is to return Home, to its Source."

The Bangalore Conference of 1975 provided yet another memorable spiritual service. Accompanied by venerable Mahatmas like Worshipful H.H. Sri Swami Visvesvara Tirtha, Revered Siva Balayogi and Worshipful Suddhananda Bharati, Swamiji shone on the dais with a rare effulgence. He unveiled the portrait of the Holy

Master and characterised this unveiling ceremony as the unveiling of Sadachara in human heart and the Yoga Parampara of Bharatavarsha. He said, "The one Supreme Being, who is adored by the common family of humanity as Allah, Khuda, Ahura Mazda, Tao, as simply 'That beyond all', the Being who is denied by the atheists, is the Ocean into which all religious streams flow. He is glorified in the Bible, the Koran, the Grantha Sahib and the Vedas. He is worshipped in synagogues, churches, mosques and temples. But His greatest temple is the human heart. He pervades, penetrates and interpenetrates all. He is the very essence of our existence". Swamiji held that the key to liberation is compassion to all creatures. Compassion should be extended even to plants and the grass that grow around us. We must live only to love and serve. Secondly, the individual soul should feel the pang of separation from the Universal Soul. He should have the spiritual hunger which drives him to sit silently, do Japa and read the scriptures. All the aspects of Yoga are the outer manifestations of this inner hunger. This yearning cannot be purchased in the market. That only God and the Saints can give.

Swamiji went about thus through the nooks and corners of Bharatavarsha creating a deep spiritual yearning in the mass mind through his persuasive discourses. Orissa had been left out till 1966. Of course Swamiji had paid a casual visit to Cuttack in 1956. A decade later he again set foot on the land of Lord Jagannath. He came to Puri as a second Chaitanya and did ecstatic, elevating Kirtan in the precincts of the temple of Lord Jagannath. He presided over the first All Orissa Divine Life Conference and infused the glory of Divine Name in the masses. Sensitive observers had the experience that purity descended on the atmosphere

with his very presence. Swamiji has paid several visits to the State after this, touring even deeply interior regions and disseminating spiritual wisdom to the people there as no one else had done before.

In 1967 he presided over the second All Orissa Divine Life Conference at Cuttack. He again visited Puri, saying that whenever he came to Orissa he would like to have the opportunity of paying homage to Lord Jagannath in His holy sanctum. Then in 1968, again, he visited Orissa to preside over the twenty-first All-India Divine Life Conference at Berhampur. Prakasam Hall, the venue, was packed with devotees and seekers eager to have a glimpse of Swamiji. Attentive eyes discerned how even in the midst of the busy schedule Swamiji sat on the dais motionless, almost in a State of Sahaja Samadhi, radiating joy, peace and bliss to the audience. Through his soul-stirring Bhajans and discourses he injected into the listeners the nectarine potion that had been so carefully prepared in the Sivananda Laboratory. His brief message to the Conference was: "The light of life is Guru's teachings. The strength of life is the Divine Name. The secret of success in life is trust in God. Dharma is the basis of life. Wealth of life is virtue. The greatest treasure is devotion to the Lord. The key to peace and blessedness is meditation. The way to supreme fulfilment is Divine Life. Reflect over what has been said, understand well its meaning. Follow it in daily life. Thus become blessed."

Swamiji came to Orissa once again in the summer of 1971, this time to the centre of the tribal belt in Bhavanipatna. Next year he went to Cuttack to preside over the twenty-third All-India Divine Life Conference. About 50,000 people from all parts of Orissa and a number of delegates from different corners of the country had assembled in this great Jnana Yajna to hear the

divine instructions of Swamiji. Swamiji gave the clarion call—"Arise Bharatavarsha, and bless the world. Blessed heir to Bharatavarsha's cultural heritage! Make thy life an effulgent radiance of India's shining ideals of renunciation and service. Make thyself the living embodiment of our Dharma and personify in yourself the sublime principles of Paropakara and of Supreme Atma Jnana. Let Bharatavarsha's lofty culture find vital expression through you and your entire life, every moment, each day. Thus through you let India be vibrantly alive, awake and roused. You Are India."

Gradually Swamiji was drawn into even interior places like Keonjhargarh. He went there to preside over the Divine Life Conference and conveyed his message of Dharma. He said, "Follow Dharma scrupulously. Proclaim Dharma. Out of Dharma cometh untold goodness and benefits to human society. May the call of Dharma sound throughout the land".

Moving into the rural Bomokai, Swamiji addressed the simple, devout village folk with a supreme simplicity and clarity. He wished that every disciple of the Holy Master should be a Nitya Nirantara Pujari. He explained the esoteric meaning of Japa and asked the seekers to keep on repeating the Divine Name at all hours and on all occasions.

When Swamiji went to preside over the next Orissa Divine Life Conference at Rourkela, he emphasised man's supreme duty of recognising divinity within himself and expressing the latent divine quality in his everyday life. Have pure conduct, be truthful, remember God constantly and spiritualise all your activities—these were the ringing notes, the fervent appeal, in his call to the busy people of the industrial township.

The voice of Chidananda now reverberated through the nerve centre of Western Orissa. Swamiji flew from Malaysia and reached Sambalpur via Kolkata to preside over the twenty-seventh All-India Divine Life Conference there. During the Conference there was a surging crowd on all four days. People in thousands thronged the venue of the meeting, eager to look at the magnetic aura radiating from his divine countenance, to listen to his inspiring words of wisdom and get enraptured by singing with him the thrilling Kirtans. In a practical advice to the seekers Swamiji emphasised the great virtue in performing one's duty by doing every little thing in an ideal way. Drops of water make a mighty ocean; the daily practice of Swadharma and Sadhana make life an ocean of bliss—these were the suggestive points he made in his message to the Conference.

For the next All-India Divine Life Conference, Swamiji went to Bhubaneshwar. In his searching message to the Sadhaks he said, "Yes, my beloved friends! The divine scales weigh human actions not only by the measures of the prayer recited and Mantras chanted, not only by the measures of candles lit, lights waved, bells rung and books read, but let me tell you clearly that the divine scales measure man by the quality of the feelings harboured in the heart, by the very words with which you speak and address your neighbours and by each and every simple action of yours in your dealings with all those amongst whom Providence has decreed that you live your life." The compassionate messenger of God through these words revealed the purpose for which God has sent us to this earth plane.

In all these platforms Swamiji made it a point to highlight the practical import of the Sanatana Dharma. He was prepared to undergo all kinds of hardship in order to elevate the masses and guide the seekers. He

has graciously served as a practical guide to the seekers of Orissa in different Sadhana Camps at Bhanjanagar, Bhadrakh, Rourkela and other places. He has encouraged the zonal Conferences of Khurdha Road, Jaipatna and Balangir by his presence. At every place his impact has been unforgettable and intense. The then Governor of Orissa, His Excellency Sri B.D. Sharma, felt so much inspired and sanctified in these Conferences that he requested Swamiji to visit the Orissa Secretariat and inspire the administrative personnel who were in charge of the secular dealings of the State. Swamiji did fulfil this request a few years later in 1978 while returning from the Sunabeda Conference.

When His Holiness completed the sixtieth year of his earthly existence (Diamond Jubilee) and his admirers clamoured for his permission to organise befitting celebrations on the occasion, he advised them to arrange a Sadhana Week and a spiritual Conference to awaken, instruct, and inspire the people of Bharatavarsha from the Tapobhumi of the Holy Master. Towering spiritual personalities graced the occasion and gave their illuminating sermons to the Jijnasus, Mumukshus and Bhaktas. The climax of the Jubilee was marked with the arrival of the holy mother Ma Anandamayi. Her sanctifying Darshan in the company of His Holiness left an indelible spiritual impact on all those present there at Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh.

Swamiji has dedicated his life to awaken humanity at large, and the blessed citizens of India in particular. Through a number of Conferences all over India he has rendered the divine service of awakening the people into a renewed awareness of the true purpose of life—the manifestation of divine perfection and spiritual beauty that lies latent in the real and eternal inner being of the individual souls. He has knocked loud on doors of the

bound souls to bring into them a flood of cosmic sunshine. He has strained hard both for the inner unfoldment and its active outer expression which alone can provide the proper corrective to the chaotic and confused state into which mankind has led itself with its blind pursuit of sense-gratification. Whenever he could not attend any of those spiritual Conferences, he unfailingly encouraged and guided the seekers from his distant camps by taking keen interest for the success of such assemblies. For instance, even from the far-off Johannesburg he wrote solicitously to the organisers at Baudh who were feeling dejected on account of his absence, and assured them with his choicest blessings that Lord Jagannath would preside over the Conference and make it a grand success. Such Conferences are a great modern need to dispel the inertia which has enveloped the consciousness of man. Through them Swamiji has launched a world-wide programme to lead the people into the paths of righteousness. No wonder, saints of our times have felt impelled to regard him as a deliverer.

RARE DIVINE PERSONALITY

The greatest treasure Sivananda has bequeathed to humanity is Chidananda, a rare divine personality cast in his own image—verily, his own replica. The Master was emphatic in his statement that Chidananda was a saint of a very high order in his previous birth and that he was born to fulfil a great mission through this, his last, birth. Gurudev exalted him above all others. He went to the extent of telling his disciples, "All of you should treat Swami Chidananda as your Guru. Even I revere him as my Guru. I have learnt countless lessons from him. I love him. I adore him." These words of the prophet cannot be taken as some casual, overgenerous compliment. As the years have rolled by, Swamiji has justified more and more in all that he has been saying and doing that he is truly incomparable. He is a glorious example of an entirely immaculate divine life. Much as was the Holy Master impressed, so also other saints have been struck by Swamiji's lofty spiritual status.

We are told that Nitya Siddhas come down to the earth plane, again and again, to guide humanity. Inscrutable are the ways of God. Inscrutable, too, are the ways of Godmen. Bound down to our petty egos we can hardly apprehend what they were and even what they are. In the Western countries many adore Swami Chidananda as the St. Francis of India. The simple prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, a favourite hymn of Swamiji, is indeed the model on which his life has been built. Still others revere him as an incarnation of Sri Chaitanya because of his ecstatic Sankirtans and his universal love. Swamiji's heart is soft and radiant—as that of a Buddha. It melts at the sight of the suffering creatures and goes out to them in deep sympathy and solicitation. His consideration extends even to the world

of plants. On the Mahasivaratri Day when devotees in the Ashram go to collect "Bilva Patra" for the worship of the Lord Siva, he advises them not to proceed towards the tree with an upraised axe, for the tree would be terrified. They are asked to approach the tree tenderly, even meekly, and beg for the leaves, as it were. The plucking, he instructs, must be done with tenderness, love and devotion.

The inner state of Swamiji, indeed, defies description. In the words of Swami Venkatesananda: "Do not try to describe him. You will fail. Silence is God's Name".

Once at Rourkela when he was introduced on the platform as a rare divine personality he said in the introductory part of his discourse that he accepted the compliment provided that every one in the audience accepted that he, too, was a divine personality. That, indeed, suggests the purpose of his birth. God seems to have sent Chidananda to convince us that, with such Sattva as he has in him, man cannot be considered as a mere mortal.

Chidananda constitutes a supreme example of Guru Bhakti. Though endowed with the supreme qualities of a Master, this great soul has chosen to play only the role of a dedicated disciple. All his stupendous moral and spiritual achievements he meekly ascribes to Guru's Grace. Whatever he does, whatever he says, it is always done in the name of Gurudev Sivananda. It is a wonderful demonstration of total erasement of the ego and of complete surrender to the Guru. In one of his inspiring talks during the lifetime of the Holy Master he emphasised: "Guru is not like God—Guru is God." With reverential gratitude he exclaimed in another discourse: "What countless merits of previous births have given us this wonderful opportunity of sitting in this sacred place and witnessing the fire coming out of this living blaze of infinite spirituality, infinite divinity that Gurudev embodies in himself!" Though Swamiji himself is an

illumined Yogi of a very high order, one who is eminently suited to answer the needs of the modern world, he never desires to project any saintly status for himself and consecrates every act of his by placing it at the holy feet of Gurudev. He never feels that he has succeeded to the seat of the Master. He always designates himself as the servant of Gurudev—this, even while formally signing the affiliation certificates of the Branches of the Divine Life Society in the capacity of Gurudev's successor, as President of the organisation. He has toured through the world several times. He has moved across the length and breadth of India carrying the message of Sanatana Dharma. He has earned tributes and felicitations as few other mortals have enjoyed. Countless seekers have resorted to his blessed mercy as their only joy in life. All these he quietly offers at the lotus feet of Gurudev. He says that God who is worshipped by the devotee is, at least to a certain extent, based on his imagination. But his Guru is physically present. The disciple worships his Sat-Guru and thus ultimately succeeds in converting Guru Bhakti into worship of God in the true sense of the term.

Swamiji never studied the Upanishads, from cover to cover, at the feet of any teacher. He did not learn them from Gurudev, either. And, yet, the Holy Master said with regard to him, "When you closely follow Swami Chidananda's lectures you will find that all the Upanishadic wisdom is brought out in them, though he has not studied the Upanishads and does not even want to study them. He brings the Upanishads from his heart. He is an embodiment of Brahmasutras and the Gita.<170> During the Sadhana Week of 1964 Swamiji gave a talk on "My Brahmasutra". In this illuminating talk he emphasised the fact that for a disciple, his Master's word is Brahmasutra. So saying, he brought out a book of the Master and read out from the same a passage which contained the cream of the Vedanta.

Thus Swamiji teaches by his exemplary living that a Sadhak should ever remain protected by the shield of

Guru Bhakti. As has been earlier referred, on his thirty-ninth birthday when all the senior Sadhaks of Sivanandashram showered their praises on him, Swamiji said, "You are all admiring a statue. The glory belongs to the sculptor. It is the wisdom and genius of the sculptor that is visible in the statue. You forget all about the sculptor and go on saying all sorts of things about the statue. The sculptor is there in Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj. The divine engineer of Swami Chidananda is Swami Sivananda. All glorification is due to those lotus feet." Swamiji showed thereby how one should dedicate the fruits of all actions including name and fame at the feet of one's Gurudev. He further draws our attention to the vital point in Sadhana that a seeker while beholding the beauty of the creation in the world of names and forms should always remember the Creator.

On another of his auspicious birth-anniversaries Hari Har Tirthaji Maharaj of Kailas Ashram came to the Sivanandashram to participate in the celebrations. In the course of his talk he spoke highly of Swamiji's service, spiritual attainments, generosity and Guru Bhakti. In his reply Swamiji expressed his deep sense of gratitude to Tirthaji Maharaj for his kind words and added, "All these praises showered on me should go to the Holy Master. I am only his instrument. If the ripe fruit is sweet, its cause is the seed. Gurudev's grace alone has made me what I am today."

In one of the Sadhana camps at Bhadrakh in Orissa a sincere seeker was interested to know whether even now Swamiji beheld Gurudev in some transcendental plane. Swamiji replied that the question of beholding Sri Gurudev did not arise in his case. Every moment he experienced and realised that the Holy master was inside him, outside him and pervaded every spec of space.

Don Briddel, a Western disciple of Swamiji, once asked him to reveal his identity. At this Swamiji pointed his finger at the picture of Swami Sivananda enshrined in an altar at the end of his room. He then explained that

when Gurudev was asked the same question he would direct the questioner to the Divine Self that is God within. Don Briddel aptly observes, "Sivananda was evidently consumed by (his) Divine Being and Swami Chidananda was so totally surrendered to that Divine Being known as Swami Sivananda that he was completely identified with Sivananda's Supreme Self."

Swamiji always sought to efface himself, reducing himself to zero, and was ever intent upon glorifying his divine Master. But refulgence such as his cannot be hidden by any means. This priceless jewel of 'Kimberly' which was discovered by Sivananda as the Kohinoor of his Mission was destined to receive adulation and honour at the hands of the highest and the noblest in the world.

"I was a gem concealed.
Me, my burning rays revealed."

These significant words of the Holy Koran come to the mind when one thinks of the personality of Swami Chidananda.

One might observe him from various angles and there would always be something marvellous to note in the actions of this man of God. Viewing the passing panorama of the world from the exalted heights of Vedantic wisdom, calm and unruffled, he yet can assume the role of a tender, loving parent to any seeking soul he encounters. Abstinence, penance, self-denial and austerity of the severest form he prescribes for himself; to others he offers friendly solicitations, brotherly devotion and maternal care. His humanitarianism, constant and consistent, has been manifested in moving ways on countless occasions.

Once Swamiji visited Sambalpur on the Maha Shivaratri Day in 1971. The day was crowded with numerous programmes. Although he was fasting, he had not a moment's rest. Early in the morning next day he had to go to Rourkela and on the request of a devotee he consented to go round the world famous Hirakud dam,

close by Sambalpur. On the way, somebody was waving his hands to stop his car. The driver was in no mood to respond. Swamiji happened to be looking through some papers and he caught a flitting glance of the man and felt that something was amiss. He asked the driver to stop the vehicle and went out. It so happened that a person lay injured there and that was the reason why the other man was trying to stop the vehicle. All at once Swamiji rushed to the side of the injured person, tore off a piece of cloth to tie it round the wound and had him carried into the car. He instructed the driver to proceed to the nearest hospital and sat near the injured man ensuring that the person was as comfortable as possible. He got the man admitted into the Medical College Hospital at Burla and left only when the attending doctor promised to be by the side of the injured person as long as was necessary. Later, Swamiji quietly admonished his co-passengers in the car for failing to stop the vehicle immediately after noticing the injured: "Just guess how we would have felt if we had been the victims of such an accident. How could I ignore the wounded friend and go ahead for my own purpose?" Such instances are legion.

Swami Krishnanandaji has cited a similar event in his "Light from the East". He writes:

"Swamiji was once travelling in a taxi with two of his colleagues from the Ashram. It so happened that on the way they found someone lying on the road, badly injured all over the body. The taxi driver, of course, would take no notice of it and rushed forward in his usual speed. But Sri Swamiji quickly observed the scene and asked the driver to stop the vehicle. They got down and on enquiry found that the man was injured due to some accident and was lying in a helpless condition. Sri Swamiji was ready immediately to lift the patient into the vehicle so that he might be taken to the nearest hospital. But the driver would not allow it for he feared that the police would regard him as the culprit and haul him up under the impression that his own vehicle might have been the

cause of the accident. The driver was vehement and would not agree to any proposal of transporting the patient in his vehicle. What was the alternative for Swamiji? He gave the driver the fare due to him and asked him to go his way, preparing himself with his two companions to lift the patient and go walking to the nearest hospital, whatever the distance. The incident needs no comment. The driver was touched to the core and agreed to take the patient in the taxi."

By sincere, selfless service one can always change the heart of the recalcitrant ones. Gurudev wrote in his pamphlet "Hints on Karma Yoga" how "all these practices will purify and expand your heart, strengthen your will and prepare the mind for the attainment of the knowledge of the Self." For Swamiji such actions have formed a part of his nature from a very young age. Anyhow, even at the stage when he is Aptakama and has nothing more to do by way of personal Sadhana he maintains these practices not merely because it is `Loka Siksha' and because his disciples and admirers will follow the self-same path but because goodness of the highest kind has no ulterior purpose—neither social nor religious.

There are few saints like Swamiji who serve mankind in so many various ways. Swamiji has worked at the grassroot levels like a zealous social reformer to eradicate evils such as drinking. He takes pity on the unfortunate alcoholics. He prays for them and courts insults while trying to bring them round. In the course of his global tour once when he was at Amsterdam, one afternoon he asked his companions to leave him alone and quietly went to a club which he had been told was the worst den of drug addicts in the city. He slipped in and had a look at all of them. Full of pity and compassion for them immediately he began praying aloud and begged them with folded hands to give up their bad ways. Some of them went near him and jeered at him. They spoke to him harshly, using very vulgar expressions. One of them

took off his own headgear and put it on Swamiji's head. Serene and undaunted, Swamiji continued to pray for them and went on appealing to them to give up the drugs. After the first few moments, after the rough ones had already played some nasty pranks, the sincerity and deep love exuded by Swamiji had the desired effect and they remained uncomfortably quiet. Swamiji told them a few words, prayed for them again, wished them well and left the place. The very next day one of the addicts came to him in a most repentant and chastened mood and attended Swamiji's Satsang. He was so moved by Swamiji that he gave up all intoxicants from that day. He narrated to others how roughly they had treated Swamiji and how Swamiji had lovingly and patiently bore it all, and Christ-like, continued to pray for their welfare.

Swamiji is keen to see that the great curse of drinking is completely rooted out from our country. Once he came forward to help Sri Sundarlal Bahuguna in his plans for picketing the liquor shops in Tehri. On 1st November, 1971 he reached Dubata, three kilometers from Tehri and then he walked the distance up to Tehri doing Kirtan all the way. The movement for prohibition was now spiritualised by Swamiji. At the end of the procession Swamiji told in his discourse that the steps taken for complete prohibition were, indeed, acts of worship of the Almighty. With his blessings thousands of Sataygrahis started picketing at the gates of the liquor shops and many of them were sent to the Jails. Ultimately the Government of Uttar Pradesh was obliged to enforce prohibition in that region. Swamiji says that for men of base desires Moksha is a distant dream. The more immediate liberation to be sought for them is to keep them away from stealing, drinking, hypocrisy and falsehood.

Swamiji's Maryada for elders, courtesy towards ladies and love of children have always been touching sights. One can notice numerous instructive acts in this regard by staying near him for a few days. He maintains

special consideration for others even on occasions of particular interest to himself. Once a meeting was held at the Delhi Town Hall under the Presidentship of Mr. Justice Patanjali Sastri, a judge of the Supreme Court of India, to felicitate Gurudev. Gurudev had also graced the function. When Swamiji, then the General Secretary, reached there he found the entire hall packed and a number of ladies were squatting near the entrance. He quietly stood near a corner without disturbing anybody by announcing his presence or trying to get in. He could if he so liked, have gone to the dais. When a well-known devotee who was accompanying him requested him to move on to the stage, he merely said, "I do not want to disturb the ladies." A small action, indeed, but how thoroughly like the Swami!

Once Swamiji was on the platform of the Guntur railway station, surrounded by a large number of devotees. When the train was about to start he got into the compartment where a berth was reserved for him. As the train began to move he saw an old lady crying on the platform lamenting that she was not able to bring out her luggage. Swamiji at once asked Asheshanandaji of his party to pull the chain. The train stopped. The old lady collected her bag and baggage and left the platform without knowing as to how the train had stopped. Swamiji stood at the door of the compartment and when the guard reached there to enquire about the matter he addressed the guard with folded hands, and said, "Please excuse me. Noticing the helplessness of the old lady I gave instruction for this chainpulling." The totality of his conduct during that small time, the unaffected sincerity, the politeness, the feeling for others, much more than the act proper were highly instructive. For Swamiji the whole universe is a big family where each one in his environment is responsible for all others.

Similarly, on another occasion when Swamiji was present in the Delhi station a large number of devotees had crowded there for his Darshan and blessings. While

in the midst of the milling crowd, his eyes fell on an old lady carrying a heavy load on her head, clutching a trunk and moving with great difficulty. Swamiji at once pushed aside the devotees and rushed near her. He spoke to her in a tender voice, snatched from her hand the heavy load and began walking by her side to carry it to the destination. Then, of course, a devotee came forward and took the trunk from Swamiji's hands and carried it for the old lady. The event, again, may appear to be very ordinary. But the manner of doing the service, the natural grace, the spontaneity and the polite way in which it was done made the act memorable.

Similar consideration is extended by this cosmic friend to birds, beasts, insects and even to plants and creepers. He says that one's progress in the spiritual path can be readily gauged by one's attitude to one's inferiors, subordinates and to the small, insignificant creatures. Beating dogs, for instance, seems to be a favourite pastime with many—and not merely with children. In the Ashram Swamiji had made it known to one and all that if anybody beat a dog the matter was to be brought to his notice immediately. The way Swamiji served sick dogs with love and care for months became proverbial in the Ashram right from his early years there. He serves them, protects them and prays for them. Once he was a guest of mother Savitri Nilakanthan at Kolkata. Savitri Mataji had a lovely pet dog with a charming coat of hair. For some months before Swamiji's visit it was suffering from an incurable disease. All its hairs fell off and it was reduced to a skeleton. The disease did not respond to the best medical attention available in the city. Savitri Mataji mentioned to Swamiji the pitiable condition of the dog. On hearing the details Swamiji asked for the dog to be brought there. He took it on his lap, patted it tenderly and as it lay there on his lap he chanted Mahamrityunjaya Mantra for its speedy recovery. To the surprise of everyone in the family the dog recovered in a few days without the administration of any medicines.

Once in the Ashram, similarly, while Swamiji was doing Kirtan an American visitor came in and quietly placed before him a tiny tender bird with wings resembling betel leaves. Obviously he had picked it somewhere outside in that half- dead condition. When the Kirtan was over Swamiji's eyes fell on the bird. In a voice charged with sadness and compassion he intoned, "Ah! who brought it here?" and then placed it on his palm and started reciting Mahamrityunjaya Mantra. The little bird was as though given a new lease of life and flew away freely after sometime.

Even when he is among vast multitudes he remains alert to the difficulties of these poor mute creatures. Once when a spiritual conference at Bomokai in Orissa was in progress, somebody in the audience beat a dog which had got into the crowd. Swamiji was at that moment engrossed in delivering his Presidential talk. He broke off abruptly and expressed his feeling of pain and dismay over the cruel act. There was a tense silence in the audience and the compassion and pain ringing in Swamiji's words touched everyone to the core. Not only is the well known rule—Ahimsa Paramo Dharmah —meticulously observed by him, ever and always in thought, speech and act; more positively, every bit of his act and will is charged with compassion and directed towards alleviation of grief in others.

His cult of non-violence is extended even to the small irritating insects like bugs and mosquitoes whom people kill almost by reflex action and do not feel any qualms whatever. Swamiji endures their stings and allows them to have their own way with his body. Once while he was doing Kirtan of the Lord's Name, a disciple saw a mosquito sitting on his body and attempted to drive it out. Before he could reach him Swamiji indicated by sign not to disturb the creature. After the Kirtan was over Swamiji told him, "The hungry one having appeased its hunger goes away automatically; you need not drive it out."

There was a similar incident at Kotdwar. While Swamiji was giving his address a poisonous insect flew towards him. Yogesh Bahugunaji, a devotee in his company, at once attempted to drive it out. Swamiji, who was then seriously engaged in making an important point, did not lose sight of this. He signalled to Bahugunaji to leave the insect alone and continued his talk. After sometime he took the insect tenderly and got it seated on his palm, assuring it perfect security, as it were. This is the unique Brahmi Sthiti of the sage who in spite of all his busy schedule in Vyavahara is constantly vigilant to observe Ahimsa and love for all creatures at all times. Such instances must be legion. The author is mentioning only a few of those which he happened to hear from persons present on those occasions.

Swamiji's manner of fulfilling the prayers of devotees often borders on the miraculous. It seems, whenever a noble Sankalpa is registered by a devotee with complete sincerity it automatically reaches Swamiji via the cosmic will. Once in the summer of 1974 a well known devotee of Orissa, Chittaranjan Mohanty, now General Secretary, Divine Life Society, Eastern Zone, Kolkata, was on his way to Canada to be with Swami Vishnudevananda at Val Morin, for some days. He intended to meet Swamiji and seek his blessings before his flight to Canada. But, he learnt from mother Kamala Chopra, at Kolkata, that Swamiji was at that time in Bombay and was scheduled to come to Kolkata only on the 26th May. Sri C.R. Mohanty was to leave for Delhi on the 16th. He was deeply aggrieved to know that he would not, after all, have a Darshan of Swamiji on the eve of his departure. But it was already evening and he could no more delay his departure. Tearfully he wrote on a piece of paper "Ab Darshan Do Ghanashyama Nath Mori Akhiya Pyasi Re", a well-known prayer of the great Bhakta Narsi Mehata which means: "O my Lord (Ghana Shyam Krishna)! My eyes are thirsting to behold Thee. Be Thou gracious to appear before me", and passed on the paper to Kamala Chopra Mataji to kindly hand over to His Holiness and

then left Kolkata. When he reached Delhi on the 18th, he met an ardent devotee of Gurudev, Sri A. Sundaram of American Express, and expressed his agony that he would not be able to meet Swamiji before going abroad. And lo! a miracle occurred. Sri Mohanty was surprised to hear from Sri Sundaram: "Come with us. We are going to receive Swamiji at Palam Air Port. Swamiji has cancelled his Kolkata trip and he is coming straight from Bombay to Delhi." One can imagine the indescribable joy of Sri Mohanty who joined Mr. Sundaram and other devotees and received Swamiji at the airport. Swamiji asked Sri Mohanty to accompany him to his resting place at Delhi and assured him that when a prayer is really intense it reaches the Cosmic Mind and is instantaneously granted.

Once at Bellary Swamiji made a short visit to the residence of a devotee. After offering prayers and distributing Prasad in his usual manner, he left immediately to attend a programme in the town. When he returned to his place of rest after the function he did something which appeared rather strange. He sent Swami Asheshanandaji to the residence of the said devotee to bring some hot milk from his house. This was rather very unusual not merely because ordinarily Swamiji never asked for things, but more so because milk was available in plenty there itself. Asheshanandaji, however, did not say anything and simply carried out the Master's instruction. He made a visit to the residence of the devotee and conveyed them Swamiji's wishes. At this the devotee's wife suddenly burst into tears and excitedly ran to fetch the milk from her kitchen. The devotee explained that his wife had been very keen to offer some hot milk to Swamiji when he visited their house earlier in the morning, but considering Swamiji's busy schedule he had forbidden her strongly to make any such requests to Swamiji. The Bhav, however, had made its impact, and Swamiji responded to it in due time. Such things may appear to be mere coincidences. But the frequency and

the manner of the occurrence force one to conclude otherwise.

Swamiji's response to the earnest prayer of his devotees verges on the miraculous. On the occasion of the fourth All Orissa Divine Life Conference, Swamiji was to proceed from Bhubaneswar to Bhawanipatna by plane. The Secretary of the Bhubaneswar Branch of the Divine Life Society, Sri Radhasyam Nanda, had arranged a public meeting at Bhubaneswar to receive Swamiji, but somehow those in charge of Swamiji's tour did not know about the programme and they saw off Swamiji at the airport. Sri Nanda was disconsolate. He did not, however, have long to suffer. The plane had already moved half the distance, when the pilot turned back saying that there were indications of bad weather ahead. So the plane came back to Bhubaneswar within the hour. Sri Nanda and other devotees who were undergoing a profound sense of dismay at Swamiji's sudden departure felt greatly relieved to know that he was back. As if he had come for the programme itself, Swamiji straight went to the meeting place and delivered his speech. At the end of the programme, he quietly told Nandaji, "You have so much deep devotion that God forced the aeroplane to come back." In such mysterious manner he fulfilled the fervent wishes of the devotees.

Once Prof. Durlabh Chandra Chaudhury, well-known disciple of the Holy Master Sivananda, had invited Swamiji to his native place to bless the villagers there. The news spread fast through all the nearby villages and when Swamiji reached there he met a crowd of about five thousand including a large number of women and children. There was no arrangement of microphones because such a large crowd was not at all anticipated. Durlabhji felt terribly uneasy. But when Swamiji stood up with his long chanting of Om there descended an extraordinary hush in that crowd of uneducated ladies and children. After the meeting Swamiji casually told Durlabhji, "I could understand

your helplessness." It was a clear demonstration of his will-power.

Often it is found that men accept a Mahatma as a Siddha only if he demonstrates Siddhis, exhibiting extraordinary power in defying the laws of Nature. But the real Siddha who has attained Self-realisation does not lay the slightest importance even on the eight major Siddhis. He dwells forever in his Satchidananda Swarupa. He is contented, free from sorrow and full of compassion. In the Bhagavad Gita Arjuna wanted to know from God, "What, O Krishna, is the description of him who has steady wisdom and is merged in the superconscious state? How does one of steady wisdom speak, how does he sit, how does he walk?" The blessed Lord said, "When a man completely casts off, O Arjuna, all the desires of the mind and is satisfied in the self by the self, then he is said to be one of steady wisdom. Not shaken by adversity, not hankering after happiness, free from fear, free from anger, free from desire, I call him a seer and an illumined one. The bonds of the mortal world are all broken. In success he does not rejoice. In failure he is not cast down. Such a man I call an illumined one." Such verily is Chidananda, an illumined Sthita Prajna, a Trigunateeta.

He lives like water on the lotus leaf. He serves all but he is attached to none. He has equal vision, balanced mind. He resides in God and so God does everything for him. All his activities are only worship of the Lord in his Virat Swarupa. They indicate that he is neither disturbed by pain nor elated by pleasure. He radiates joy, peace and bliss towards all humanity. In short, he is divinity in flesh and blood.

Once in the Summer of 1978 Sri K.K. Varma, a lecturer in Colvin Talukdar College of Lucknow went to Rishikesh and eagerly sought out Swamiji. He did not wish to discuss anything with the saint. He had travelled all the way, he said, only to have a look at Swamiji. To Ramswarupji, the attendant of Swamiji, he explained the

background of his visit. Swami Chinmayananda, the illustrious saint-scholar, was giving a series of discourses on Gita during his Gita Jnana Yajna at Lucknow in 1977. In course of his talk he dealt with the characteristics of a Sthita Prajna, the ideal Godman of the holy scripture. At the end of the talk, Prof. Varma who was, indeed, very much impressed, sought an interview with Chinmayanandaji and put the straight question—"Is the ideal Godman of Gita a mere scriptural representation or a living reality? Is there anybody in India today who may fittingly be called a Sthita Prajna?" The erudite monk who is not given to easy praise paused for a moment and then replied with all seriousness and solemnity—"Yes. There are such great ones. One is Mother Anandamayi and the other is Swami Chidananda. One should behold them and get sanctified."

Innumerable incidents of his life reveal his mental balance in pleasure and pain, heat and cold, gain and loss, success and failure, honour and insult. Even in the midst of his busy schedule he beholds the play of the three Gunas as a silent witness. Once while he was at Val Morin in the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centre directed by Swami Vishnudevananda, due to a short circuit in the electricity cables his quarters caught fire. By the time he noticed, it was already a huge blaze. He calmly came out of the quarters and knocked on the door of the hall where Swami Vishnu was holding a Yoga class. Swami Vishnu was surprised to see Swamiji standing there. Swamiji told him to do something about the fire. But Vishnu Swami found Swamiji in such a state of total poise that he could not at first believe and thought it to be a joke. The next moment, however, he knew it was true and took the necessary steps to put out the fire. Swamiji lost all his essential articles and many important records in the fire. People present there were, however, astonished to find that Swamiji did not show any signs of sorrow or worry during the entire episode. When he was later asked what his feelings really were at that time, he said, that, in

fact, he did feel sorry, but it was for a couple of friendly spiders who were his companions in the room and who must have perished in the blaze. What incomparable compassion! What perfect even-mindedness! The Sthita Prajna of Gita stood there unperturbed as calm as mid ocean with only a pure volition producing compassion in him for all creatures, big and small.

Once Swamiji was travelling by train in a first class compartment from Cuttack to Jajpur Road. When the train reached the destination, no one remembered his attache. The loss was discovered only after the train had left. The attache contained a number of valuable papers and Swamiji's articles of personal use. The devotees who accompanied him were so much perturbed that they were planning to cancel Swamiji's programme from Jajpur to Keonjhar so that they could follow the train in a car and retrieve the attache. But Swamiji calmly told them that they had no business to cancel the work given to him by God. He himself suggested that they should only send a telephonic message to the officials at the next major station and attend to the business at hand. After his tour of Keonjhar when the party reached Balasore, the attache was, indeed, safe with the station master.

From there Swamiji was to go to Kolkata. On the way to the station the party had to cross an overbridge. It was already time and they moved briskly. When the other members of his party reached the platform the train had already arrived, but Swamiji was still on the other side of the over bridge. When some devotees, anxiously ran to locate him, they found him by the side of a blind person. It so happened that the blind man had begged Swamiji to give him something but Swamiji could not give him anything because his bag had already been taken to the platform—nor could he go away without giving him something. The moment the devotees saw him they requested him to kindly make haste for the train might leave any moment. Swamiji did not comment; he only spread his upper garment and begged them all on behalf

of the blind man. The devotees poured into the apron notes and coins. Swamiji collected everything and gave the large amount to the blind man whispering confidentially in his ears that he should be careful with the money. After that he calmly crossed the overbridge, got into his compartment and did a little Divya Nam Kirtan. Only then did the train start. Swamiji's unruffled state of mind and his compassion which overpower all considerations of personal difficulty are beautifully illustrated by this incident.

Swamiji knows only God and he lives only to carry out His will. He does not plan for the future. He gives his whole being to the task at hand. Every work is of equal importance to him. Once he was in Koln in Germany in the midst of a Satsang. At the end of his Satsang people crowded around him in great excitement. Swamiji was to catch the plane in a very short time. But while the organisers were anxiously looking at their watches and wondering whether Swamiji would succeed in catching the plane at all, he sat there calmly reciprocating the Bhav of the devotees and talking to them. At long last, just as he was getting up, a lady rushed in and requested him to give a little time to bless her dying mother whom she had carried to that place. Swamiji at once went up to the old lady and kneeling down very close to her offered his prayers to the Lord for her peace. Everybody there felt an extraordinary sensation of joy while Swamiji offered his ardent prayers. And then, only after he had completed this work, he left the place to catch his flight to Switzerland. The organisers were, of course, sure by this time that the plane must have left. But it so happened that the plane was late and Swamiji was not to miss it. He might miss a flight, though he has never done so in spite of being often detained at the nick of time by his mission of mercy. But, in any case, that was not going to be a cause of worry. There was to be no hurry even at the last moment. Till the last second every item was to be well attended and only then was he free to carry on God's work in Switzerland as per schedule.

Once Swamiji was moving by train through North India. As usual, he did some Kirtan on the platform praying for the welfare of others and when the train began to move he got into his bogie. By that time some rich businessman had come in and having thrown out Swamiji's bed was comfortable on the berth allotted to Swamiji. Swamiji heard the man sarcastically telling Ram Ratanji of loving memory, a devotee accompanying him, that somebody must have donated the first class fare to the Swami. As the indignant Ram Ratanji was about to retort, Swamiji meekly said that the Sethji was correct and that, being a Sannyasi, he need not have the comfort of a cushion. So saying, he spread his bed on the floor by the side of the berth and lay down there. The unruffled contented manner in which Swamiji meekly forfeited his legal claim over the berth had immediate effect on the Sethji who came to know that he was dealing with an extraordinary person and repentantly begged Swamiji to excuse him and prayed him to come back to his berth. In such a situation anybody of lesser equanimity and humility would have demurred or made a scene. Chidananda who had undergone total self-effacement did not think that there was any occasion to be vexed or agitated. And now there was again an exemplary gesture. When he saw that the Sethji was full of sincere remorse, instead of obstinately remaining on the floor he quietly went over to the berth without any fuss. The Lord says in Gita: "Such a Para Bhakta does not produce any anxiety in his fellowmen; nor does he allow himself to be disturbed by the world. He is not swayed by joy and envy, anxiety and fear. Therefore, he is dear to me.... His attitude is the same towards friend and foe. He is indifferent to honour and insult.... He values praise and blame equally. He can control his speech. He is content with whatever he gets. His home is everywhere and nowhere..." This scriptural portrayal of equanimity in Swamiji is something that has to be seen to be properly understood.

As has been already pointed out, Swamiji never exhibits any Siddhis. But in some exigencies his healing touch and simple prayer have really produced miraculous results. Being very compassionate and tender-minded, he melts at the sight of suffering men and on many such occasions his prayers have been seen to be producing instantaneous magical cures. Once in a dark summer night of 1953 while Swamiji was talking to Sri Indrajit Sharma, a devotee from Delhi, they heard a sudden shriek. A little girl had been stung by a poisonous scorpion. Swamiji at once took her into the Kutir and asked her to lie down on the bench. He brought a towel and rubbed it on the affected part taking the Lord's Name all the while. He did not apply any medicine or herb nor did he chant any of the prescribed Mantras. And yet the girl was immediately cured. She at once got up totally relaxed declaring cheerfully that she no longer felt any pain.

During a spiritual conference at Rourkela, once Swamiji left the dais for a short while to give some people a personal interview. Sri Madan Mohan Pradhan, an ex-minister of Orissa, who was running high temperature at that time had also come to meet Swamiji and receive his blessings. A devotee by his side told Swamiji that Sri Pradhan was having high fever. At this Swamiji looked at him with his compassionate eyes, caught hold of his hand and said, "You have no fever." Somehow the fever vanished and Sri Pradhan was amazed to find himself absolutely hale and hearty at once.

Sri Raju Subuddhi, an old devotee from Bhanjanagar has narrated to the author his personal experience of Swamiji's miracle healing. On one occasion when Swamiji was at Bhanjanagar for a Sadhana Camp, this gentleman met him and narrated the terrible agony he was having for many months with some unbearable burning sensation in the cerebral regions. Graciously Swamiji just placed his palm on the devotee's head as if

to find out the intensity of the burning sensation. And that was enough! Suddenly the old man felt an ice-cold current coursing inside his head and he was relieved of his pain for ever.

The present author himself had an unforgettable experience of the power of Swamiji's blessing during the twenty-seventh All India Divine Life Conference at Sambalpur, where he happened to be discharging the duties as General Secretary. On the second day of the Conference he received a telegram that his old father in their village in the distant Ganjam district had a paralytic stroke, and was lying in a critical condition. On receiving the telegram he felt anxious and distressed. Finding it hard to take a decision for himself he forwarded the telegram to Swamiji inscribing on top of the paper—"kindly instruct this Sevak about his duty at the present moment". When the paper was taken to Swamiji, he was engrossed in writing something. However, when the message was orally communicated, he paused for a moment and then said aloud without looking up, "Nothing untoward will happen. This is not the time. The crisis is averted". He then considerately added: "Of course, Beheraji may certainly go, if he wishes to." Strengthened by the words of the Master, this servant opted to stay on, for the conference was to continue for another two days. The very next day he received a telegram, communicating the information that his father's condition had considerably improved. The sense of deep gratitude that welled up in this Sevak's heart for the kind Master is easy to imagine. The previous day itself His Holiness had appealed the assembly of about ten thousand devotees in the conference to repeat with him the Mahamrityunjaya Mantra ten times for the sick man to come round. Swamiji's will, identified with the Cosmic Will, worked the distant healing and saved the ailing father from an imminent collapse. The assembled seekers, too, realised the efficacy of Mahamrityunjaya Mantra when this Sevak later expressed to them his gratitude and announced the

magical effect of the Mantra. Only a rare divine personality could give such an assurance with absolute calmness as did Swamiji on that crucial occasion.

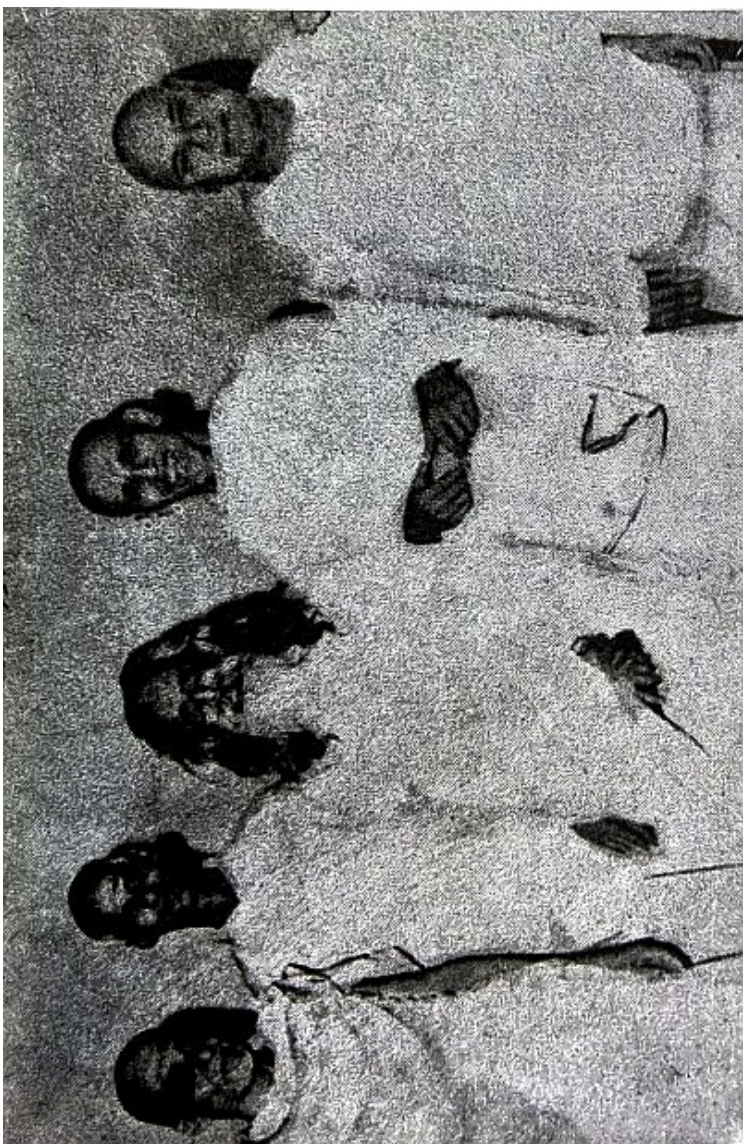
A Siddha Yogi has immeasurable powers. He has command over the elements. But he is ever on the path of love and surrender. He only seeks to fulfil the will of God. There are, however, occasions when he is moved by the divine impulse of compassion to shield men in distress. So also there have been special occasions when he appears to be intervening with the elements. During an All India Divine Life Conference at Hyderabad there was one such incident. Swamiji's resting place at Begumpet was at a distance of about five miles from the venue of the conference. On the second day of the conference when he was about to start from his resting place, there was some unusually heavy downpour. Swamiji casually asked the devotees with him whether the rain was urgently needed then at Hyderabad. The devotees gave a negative reply. Swamiji then remained silent and waited for the rain to pass. The delegates at the venue of the conference were meanwhile depressed at the sight of the dark cloud, for even a brief downpour would have caused complete dislocation, the conference being staged on an open ground. To the utter surprise and relief of all, however, the clouds that were closing on from all directions only a few minutes ago, sailed away without dropping any rain. When Swamiji reached there he apologised for his delay that had been caused by heavy rainfall in the other part of the city. He offered his thanks to God and Gurudev for protecting the venue from the rains. To many this might seem not particularly indicative of anything. But the devotees and organisers of the conference had no doubt that it was a clear manifestation of Swamiji's influence over the element.

On the eve of the twenty-sixth All-India Divine Life Conference at Bangalore, similarly, the whole of the previous night there had been terrific rainfall. Even in the morning on the day of the conference it was still

raining and the weather was ominous. The organisers thought of postponing the conference. At this Ram Ratanji, a well-known devotee said emphatically, "You should know that Swamiji has command over the elements. You must have absolute faith in Swamiji and pray for his intervention." The devotees prayed. And, to be sure, just a few hours before the conference the clouds completely lifted. It was full of sunshine and the scorching sun dried up the muddy ground in no time. Those who reached there at the time of the inauguration could not believe that a few hours back the situation there had been so depressing. Swamiji does not demonstrate miracles. But miracles occur in a mysterious manner by his very presence and simple prayers. And when they occur, he stands with the others with childlike-simplicity to witness, as it were, the working of the miracles taking place through the grace of God and Gurudev.

Swamiji perennially dwells in his divine nature and beholds the same Tattwa enveloping the entire universe. His life is based on the truth that all is pervaded by God. In everything he does he teaches humanity that the world is God in manifestation and Divya Tattwa is "Otaprota". This is the spiritual secret which he divulges to men by his practice and precepts.

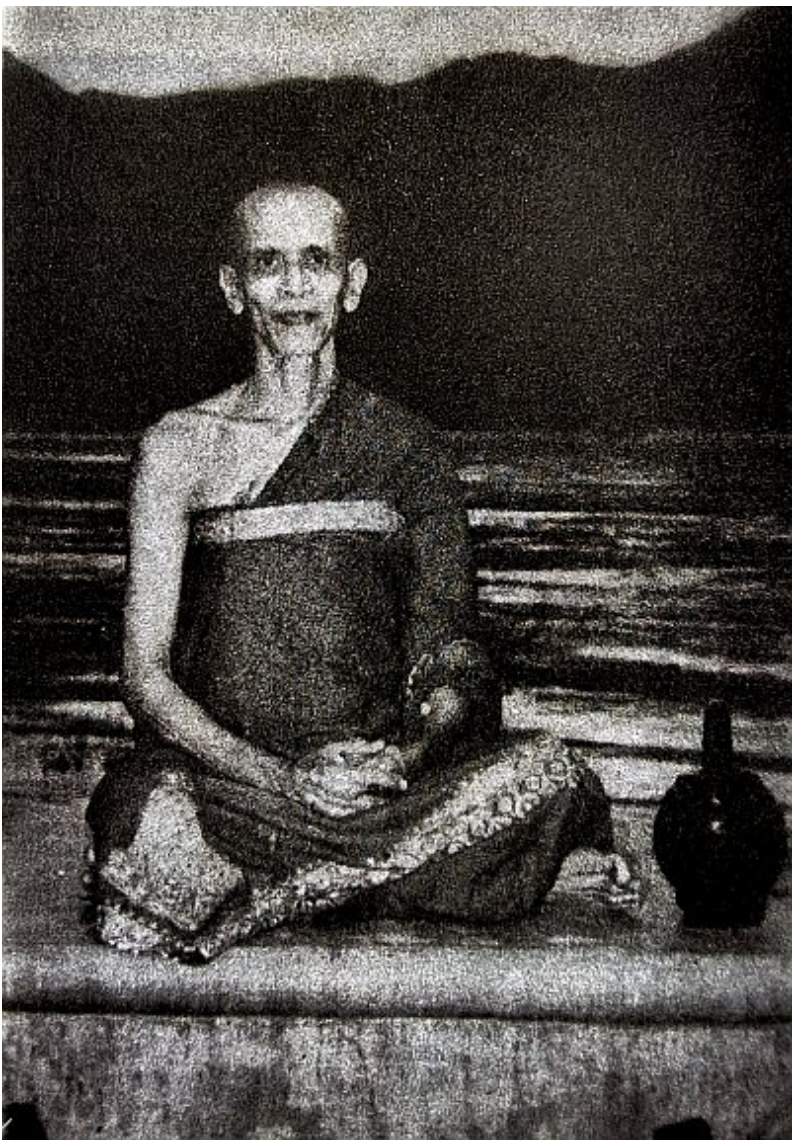
Once a number of devotees from Orissa led by Sri Durlabh Chandra Chaudhury had been to Raigarh to meet Swamiji. When they arrived, at Swamiji's camp they found him just alighting from the car. Prostrations over, Durlabhji enquired. "How is Swamiji's health?" In answer Swamiji sang out joyfully his favourite Vedantic song, "Har Halme Almast Satchidanand Hum.—In all conditions I am Knowledge Bliss Absolute." The spontaneous, solemn assertion of that moment registered a deep impression on the hearts of the devotees. Immediately, however, he added, "Bhagavan ne jaise rakha hai", "as ordained by the Lord". In the same town Swamiji gave a talk in the local bar-council one



Swamiji with his Colleagues: L. to R.–Krishnanandaji, Dayanandaji, Premanandaji Swamiji, Madhavanandaji

Presiding over the Silver Jubilee of the All India Divine Life Conference

Veritable Sthitaprajna



Loftiness....Serenity.....Compassion....Service

evening. At the end of the discourse, the persons present there were introduced to him. In his turn Swamiji began introducing the devotees who accompanied him. While doing so he referred to Dr. Govind Prasad Sharma, the Secretary of the Raigarh Branch of the Divine Life Society, as his Guru Bhai. A young lawyer pointed out that Dr. Sharma had earlier referred to Swamiji as Gurudev and wanted to know if there was any contradiction in the two statements. Swamiji explained that Gurudev Sivanandaji Maharaj was Sharmaji's Master; but Sharmaji could not take initiation from him and, therefore, as Gurudev's deputy, he had given it to Sharmaji. The lawyer was not satisfied and wanted to carry on an argument, but then Swamiji suddenly looked solemn and added, "For me he is verily Lord Narayana Himself." He wanted all to realise the ultimate nature of things as narrated in the Narayana Sukta. From this Vedic text he often cites the hymn:

Yatcha Kinchit Jagat Sarvam Drisyate Sruyatėpi Va;
Antarbahischa Tat Sarvam Vyapya Narayana Sthitah.

All that is heard or seen inside and outside the whole world is pervaded by Narayana. That is the burden of his song of life. He sees God in every face. Once a devotee came with his family to the Ashram and requested Swamiji to conduct the Annaprasana ceremony of his baby in the Samadhi shrine of Sri Gurudev. The way Swamiji conducted the ceremony made it memorable. The whole act was spiritualised by him. At first he sat down in front of the baby like an ardent devotee before Gopala Krishna. He offered his prayers in his sweet voice to Bala Krishna and, with all earnestness and love, invited, even begged, the baby to come to his lap and then fed him sweet Payasam in a most affectionate and tender manner. He offered the rest of the Payasam in the plate as Prasad to all assembled there including the present author and he himself partook a little of that. To him the baby was not a mere human child, but a pure manifestation of divinity.

On another occasion, while he was touring the Ganjam district of Orissa, on his way from Balipadar to Buguda, Swamiji saw a group of small boys playing on the road side. He asked the driver to stop the vehicle and brought out a bunch of plantains to be distributed among them. He told Durlabhji to do the job. Durlabhji got down from the car and called the boys aloud to come near and take the plantains. At this the boys fled away, thinking it to be some trap. Swamiji softly admonished Durlabhji for his brusque manner and explained, "The boys do not expect anything from us. Therefore instead of calling them here, you should approach them with Bhav and feed them with Prem." Durlabhji acted accordingly and then having realised the spiritual import of Swamiji's instructions said, "Swamiji! Now I realise, it was meant to be a Puja." At this Swamiji added, "Yes, Mahapuja." It is not merely the physical act but the spiritualisation of the very thought process that transforms the feeding into an offering made to the Lord manifested as simple children.

Once during his stay at Jyoti Vihar, the Sambalpur University Campus, Swamiji wanted a barber to shave his head. When the barber came, Swamiji politely asked him his name. The barber said that his name was Madhava. Then, to the utter astonishment of the barber, Swamiji prostrated himself at the feet of Madhava who had to serve him as barber. Before he could receive the service of the barber he first of all offered his grateful prayers to the man. When the shaving was over, Swamiji offered him plenty of fruits as Bhog and some coins in the form of Dakshina. Thus by personal example he imparts the lesson that the seeker should behold Madhava in Manava and rise from humanity to divinity.

There must be innumerable such incidents, countless flowers manifesting the fragrant essence of Swamiji's divine personality. His life reveals the truth that God is present in every spec of space. Like the mystic poet Tulsi Das he beholds the Divine Mother Sita

and Lord Ramachandra everywhere and in everybody. Such a saint who beholds the Lord everywhere and beholds the whole universe in Him is eternally in divine awareness. He is, indeed, a rare divine personality, who after protracted Sadhana of several births, has realised that all that is, is pervaded by God. The Lord says in the Gita:

> Through many a long life
> His discrimination ripens.
> He makes Me his refuge.
> Knows that Brahman is all.
> How rare are such great ones! (VII-19)

It is because of this supreme egolessness and immaculate purity of vision that Gurudev had affirmed, "This is his last birth." Chidananda is indeed that illumined sage, the rare divine personality, who, through the merits of his penance of several births, today beholds the Lord everywhere, and abides in Him for ever and ever. Among God-realised souls, he shines as a blessing to mankind. It is for mankind now to hear his clarion call: "O man! Thou art divine. You are not this physical body, you are not this restless mind. You are radiant Divya Atman. Each one of you is a divine personality." He has come to men as a Messiah and has been moving among them from door to door, from the East to the West, from poor little huts to palatial buildings, to teach the great lesson that man should give up animality, and rise from humanity to divinity and thus realise the central purpose of the human existence.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TREASURE HOUSE OF TEACHINGS

Very early during their association, one day the Holy Master exclaimed joyously about his great disciple: "I have found out his genius... Now he cannot escape from me." Since then, apart from the periods of his intense Sadhana in the seclusion of Himalayan caves and undisclosed wanderings, hardly a day passed when Swamiji did not give some inspiring speech or compose some inimitable writing pregnant with wisdom. These words of wisdom have been composed to embrace an extended spectrum of styles and theme; they have been produced on a wide variety of occasions, and offer a most comprehensive spiritual commentary suited to the understanding and use of modern men of various callings and diverse temperaments.

On the very year he went to Gurudev, he wrote with a wonderful facility and fervour the immortal and incomparable biography of the Master, Light Fountain. In this spiritual commentary of Gurudev's life he unfolded the deeper aspects of the Master's living and teaching as no one else had done before. Its burning spiritual ardour evoked the appreciation of Gurudev himself. The semi-biographical work is a profoundly revealing document of the Master's self-development, inner unfoldment and spiritual perfection. Swamiji brought out here the importance of small things pertaining to ordinary human sympathies, apart from esoteric and personal Sadhana, in the moulding of a great spiritual career. He had shown how Gurudev started his Sadhana with apparently trivial things. From Gurudev's diary he cites the following self-imposed discipline: "Give up salt. Give up sugar. Give up spices. Give up vegetables. Give up chillies. Give up tamarind. Unless you practise all these things you cannot become a

real Sadhu." This was the secret of the awe-inspiring endurance which made the Master so great. He wanted his disciples to know that Sadhana was not confined to the chamber of meditation, that all work had to be converted into worship, that the entire personality had to be divinised. Swamiji brought out this spiritual secret in his Light Fountain in a very memorable style. He has shown how spiritual truths are not so many sentences on the pages of scriptures but facts of being and doing in the lives of saints like the Holy Master.

Next in importance to the above revealing biographical work comes Swamiji's invaluable exposition of Devi Mahatmya. During the nine days' worship of the Divine Mother in the Ashram in the autumn of 1953, he delivered nine discourses which were both profound and lyrical in quality. In a style that was at once intimate and penetrating he brought home to the audience the nature of the demoniac forces deeply imbedded in the human mind. The Divine Mother as Mahakaali enables the seeker to know how to destroy these demoniacal forces. Swamiji illustrated the Sadhak—the benevolent process of destruction with an apppropriate modern example of antibiotics which are potent destroyers of germs but are life-savers to the one infected by these germs as well. Destruction is the spring-board of creation. Summing up the first three days' worship of the Mother in Her form of Malakaali, Swamiji called upon man to sacrifice the beast in him. Once he is free from the clutches of the demoniac forces, the aspirant becomes qualified to worship the Mother as Mahalakshmi, the form in which She is adored during the succeeding three days. This Puja endows man with eight kinds of prosperity. But the right sort of devotees only crave for Daivi Sampat or divine virtues. Being endowed with the divine virtues the aspirant is finally fit for the worship of Mahasaraswati, Mother as wisdom. Swamiji emphasised that to speak little, to speak the truth and to speak sweetly constituted the practical worship of Mahasaraswati. In esoteric

sense Mahasaraswati is also an embodiment of the sacred Mantra conveyed by the preceptor. Repetition of the Guru Mantra is the highest form of worship of Mahasaraswati, which ultimately endows the seeker with the highest illumination. Swamiji showed how, through such a process, the tenth day can be realised as the glorious day of Vijaya or spiritual victory. The inner spiritual meaning of the nine days' worship thus beautifully brought out by Swamiji was later published under the title, God As Mother.

As early as 1946, Swamiji used to write several articles about Gurudev under the pseudonym, Kausik. Those writings revealed a deep understanding of the Holy Master's divine personality. They were compiled under the caption World Guide Sivananda, and published in 1957 on the occasion of the Platinum Jubilee of Gurudev. The work, distinguished for its brilliant perceptiveness, is a priceless aid to every aspirant.

Swamiji was also keen to propagate the message of the Master in popular ways. A Museum, for example, seeks to educate people in a delightfully concrete visual manner. Swamiji harnessed this technique for spiritual purposes and organised the Yoga Museum. He collected and arranged the materials used by the Master such as the pictorial representation of places of his early Tapascharya. In the form of a guide-book for a similar setup put together by revered Swami Paramanandaji Maharaj, our Swamiji wrote a book titled Sivananda Regalia in 1958 somewhat similar to the book titled the Sivananda Yoga Museum. This latter book, divided into twelve chapters, comprises only eighty-four printed pages. But the text which is in the nature of a floral offering at Gurudev's feet makes it a thrilling spiritual adventure for every reader. Here Kutir No. 111 of Swargashram where the Master did intense Tapas for eighteen years, or Annakshetra established by him to provide hospitality to the inmates and guests, are

described not as historical places but as objective corner-stones of Gurudev's divinising efforts.

Swamiji had always some special consideration for young students. A special interview he gave to a group of students in 1959 has been recorded and published in the form of a brochure, *Students, Spiritual Literature and Sivananda.* There he exhorts them to be radiant torch-bearers of the Indian Culture. He counsels them to study such works of the Master as "Advice to Students", "Practice of Brahmacharya", "Sure Ways for Success in Life and God-realisation", "Ethical Teachings", "Students' Success in Life" and "Divine Life for Children" and to build their lives on the firm foundation of ethical discipline. He urges that the plant of life has to be watered daily with the shower of Svadhyaya. He offers them a package programme consisting of some very judicious habits in food, thought and conduct and suggests that it would ensure both material progress and spiritual prosperity.

When the Yoga Vedanta Forest University (now called Academy) was founded by the Master in 1948, Swamiji as its Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Raja Yoga was the very soul of the institution. For about a decade he conducted classes in the Academy and gave a series of highly instructive and inspiring lectures which were compiled and published in 1960 under the caption *Yoga.* This voluminous compendium is perhaps his magnum opus, comprising the soul-elevating discourses of one who is a noble saint, and erudite scholar and a great Sadhak rolled into one. As adumbrated earlier this great work gives us the message of Sanatana Dharma in its pure and practical form.

After the Maha Samadhi of the Master when his paper on Satsanga and Svadhyaya came out as posthumous publication in 1965, Swamiji added to it a brochure on *The Importance of Guru Bhakti,* and *Why Svadhyaya.* In these addenda he laid emphasis on the

fact that Satsang with a particular saint for a protracted period culminates in the divine relationship of Guru-Sishya and thus conveys the seeker in a definite process towards the attainment of the goal of life. Svadhyaya is also of paramount importance to a Sadhak because the reading and re-reading of the selfsame spiritual sentences leave an indelible impression in his mind. Swamiji affirms that Satsanga and Svadhyaya by themselves can transform the entire inner nature and once the inner state is truly purified, even a single effort, as it were, at meditation can lead one to Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

A handbook of Swamiji's instructions was a long felt need. Swami Premanandaji met Swamiji as early as 1956 to express his Sankalpa to complete such a handbook. Swamiji's loving words, full of compassion for his fellow-men had the effect of chrism or soothing holy oil. Seeing that the words which come out of Swamiji's holy lips or pen have a tremendous power, Premanandaji collected some select writings and speeches of His Holiness and in 1968 presented them in the following sixteen sections—Cosmogony, Cosmolatory, Conscience, Contentment, Compassion, Certitude, Character, Continence, Charity, Courtesy and Cordiality, Conservation of Speech, Caution, Concentration and Contemplation, Consummation, Corner-stones and Clarion Call. Swamiji's messages on these sixteen themes are as though sixteen divine petals of Chidananda's personality. The book called Chidananda's Chrism was an offering made to His Holiness on his fifty-first birthday. The central message of Swamiji through the pages of this handbook is to "drip with compassion and love with every breath" of the body.

The present author who attended the sessions of the Divine Life Conference at Hyderabad in 1971 compiled Swamiji's divine outpourings there. The booklet captioned Chidananda Speaks was presented to His Holiness at the fourth All Orissa Divine Life Conference

at Bhawanipatna for free distribution. In the discourses under reference Swamiji laid emphasis on the fundamental truth, "Bhagavan is ours by divine right. We are in Him. He is in us. This is hundred per cent true."

On the sacred occasion of his fifty-sixth birthday was released his Message to Mankind comprising his lectures `Call to Mankind', `Yoga', `Guru and Disciple', `Sadhana and Religion', and `Divine Life'. In these discourses he asks us to realise the great significance of this life upon earth. He urges that life and Sadhana should be synonymous. Living itself should be a spiritual process. The spirit of Yajna should saturate our entire being.

Swamiji's teachings are also revealed to us in his little booklets released on some special occasions. One such writing is Swami Krishnananda. In the Ashram Swamiji has lived with revered Krishnanandaji for more than thirty years and even during the life time of Gurudev the two spiritual stalwarts were regarded as beacon lights of divine unity. Swamiji regards Krishnanandaji as verily his own self. When the golden jubilee of this practical Vedantin was celebrated in 1972, Swamiji wrote the booklet depicting Krishnanandaji as a Titikshu, Tapasvi, Jitakrodha and a Jnani. The booklet indicates the kind of relationship Swamiji has with the senior disciples of the Holy Master. In his recent contribution to the Souvenir released on the sacred occasion of the sixtieth birthday of revered Madhavanandaji, similarly, he has expressed his appreciation by declaring that Madhavanandaji was greater than him on the point of eradication of anger. Swamiji thus teaches us by personal example how we should respond to good people around us and their sterling good qualities with humility and sincere handsome compliments.

1973 saw the release of Swamiji's Path to Blessedness which gives us the quintessence of the Ashtanga Yoga of Maharshi Patanjali. In his own words, "It is a simple exposition of the inner science of Self-realisation through the path of self-subdual, mind control, concentration and meditation." In these lectures he has devoted greater attention to the foundation of Yama and Niyama than to the more developed later stages of concentration, meditation and Samadhi. As an astute practitioner of Yoga he has very realistically noted the fundamental deficiencies in modern men and has, therefore, offered practical correctives for their success in Yoga.

In his *Guide to Noble Living* he has drawn the attention of Sadhaks to the fact that all life is Yoga. Yoga is not merely confined to periodical meditations. This body is meant for the service of others. The rich humanisation and divinisation of practical life constitutes the real Yoga for him. Therefore, he shows the right way to reach the goal: "Start with virtue, pass through holiness and culminate in Godliness." He says that divine life is naturally a life based on Yoga and informed by Vedanta. He asks the aspirants to keep such a fire of Yoga burning forever inside them. In his talks on practical Sadhana he offers the following hints :—

1. Never allow the mind to be completely extrovert.
2. Create the proper attitude by constant reflection, constant Svadhyaya of scriptures which show the vanity of the world, the worthlessness of earthly objects and the perishable nature of the entire creation.
3. Keep the mind fixed on God. Always do mental repetition of God's Name. Do Nama Smarana.
4. When a Vritti arises, do not think about it; let it sink back and subside.
5. Liquidate the Vasana through Japa, Kirtan, prayer, Satsanga and Svadhyaya.

6. Lessen the Vasanas and strengthen the will-power.
7. Understand the mind, study this mind and know this machinery well and know also how to manage it.
8. When the desires come do not fulfil them.
9. Have self introspection and self-analysis and in doing that be unsparing to yourself.
10. Truthfulness, compassion, purity—these are the funda- mental things which have to support all activity of the physical plane.
11. Live a life of moderation.

For the modern men who always remain busy from dawn to dusk he prescribes the divine psychology of auto-suggestion, "Remember your lost heritage, your real nature and reassert it again and again." He suggests the following three points as a complete course of Sadhana:—

1. Before you begin any action imagine and try to feel that what you are about to do is a grand Bhajan of the Lord.
2. As you go on doing the work, every now and then try to feel that the work is not being done by you, that you are a mere instrument and it is the omnipresent power of the Lord that is working through you.
3. When you have finished the work, do so as an offering to the Lord. Let your last action be a whole-hearted Arpanam—*Krishnarpanam*

What had been said by His Holiness in "A Guide to Noble Living" has been put forth in an abridged from in The Pilgrim Road, released on the sacred occasion of his Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

In order to maintain a close personal touch with the millions of devotees all over the world Swamiji has been addressing open letters to them, at first in the "Wisdom Light" under the caption *The President Writes* and then,

in "The Divine Life" under the caption *Sivanandashram Letters.* Through these letters Swamiji has kept the devotees fully informed about all that happens in his tours. The most important aspect of these epistles is his direct inspiring appeal to Sadhaks for their quick evolution. Here he also gives them the benefit of the Satsangs he has with other great spiritual luminaries during his travels to different corners of the world. Some of the epistles were compiled in 1974 under the caption Advice on Spiritual Living.

The seekers encounter many problems in the course of their Sadhana. Swamiji prescribed for them a number of powerful methods to ride over the obstacles in his *Guidelines to Illumination* which was released in 1975. The work is culled from Swamiji's speeches, most of which were given abroad during 1969-70. In this work Swamiji exhorts: "Divinity is your birthright. Unfold it by regular Sadhana. Attainment of God is the supreme purpose of life. Without this aim in life the life of an individual is a mere waste." He has cautioned the seekers and practitioners of Yoga to keep themselves away from alluring psychic powers. His choice instruction to humanity is, "Wake up at dawn each day to salute the universal form of God. Bow down in adoration unto Him before you start the day. Fill your day with your spirit of worshipfulness."

Swamiji has made untiring efforts to reach every nook, corner and niche of Bharatavarsha carrying to the people the eternal message of Sanatana Dharma. Towards the close of 1975 he delivered a few discourses before the rural population near Bhanjanagar and provided for them an invigorating spiritual tonic. The Oriya version of these lectures has been published by the Bhanjanagar Branch of the Divine Life Society with the title Sadhana. In these discourses he has called upon the simple rural folk to strive for the attainment of Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. He does not ask them to give up their social life.

Swamiji has initiated countless seekers of the East and the West into Sadhana by very graciously granting them the powerful Mantra Diksha, thereby providing them the necessary equipment for the practice of the Divine Name which is the most potent spiritual method in this age. His discourse on this aspect of Sadhana has been published in Hindi under the title Advice to the Initiated Disciples. He has asked the disciples to keep in mind the following points in their daily practice:—

1. Have the conviction that repetition of Mantra leads to God-realisation in Kali Yuga.
2. Know that Guru is God. Nama and Nami are identical.
3. Do at least eleven Maalas of Japa daily.
4. Never discontinue the daily Japa.
5. Keep the Ishta Mantra a secret.
6. Once in a week on every Mantra Diksha day have partial fast. Once in a year on the Mantra Diksha date or Tithi have complete fast.
7. Cultivate virtues and eradicate vices.
8. Behold your Ishta Deva in all Gods and Goddesses and know that God is both personal and impersonal.
9. Feel the presence of God and Guru at all times.
10. Every initiated disciple should cultivate purity and chastity.

In one of the Zonal Divine Life Conferences held at Khurda Road Swamiji gave a series of three lectures in Hindi on the principles and techniques of meditation. In these lectures he asked the Sadhaks to maintain purity of conduct and a burning desire for liberation. Then only the techniques adopted for meditation would bear fruit. Swamiji said, "Try to visualise the ocean of Satchidananda which exists in the three periods of time. Your Ishta Deva comes out of this in the form of a wave with all personal attributes. Behold this personal form

and repeat His Mantra. Mentally consecrate all diverse thoughts at His lotus feet. At the close of the meditation feel that your Ishta Deva is merged once again in the ocean of Satchidananda. Observe Mauna for a few minutes and then come out of your chamber of meditation with mental poise. Do not get entangled in worldly activities immediately after this practice. Before you begin this practice concentrate on the form of your Guru for a couple of minutes. Seek his blessings and then go ahead in your meditation on your Ishta Deva." These hints have been incorporated in the Oriya version of the lectures published under the title Dhyana Sadhana by Sri C.S. Das on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee celebration.

A small booklet - The Eye of the Hurricane, comprising Swamiji's discourse delivered at Los Angeles, was released in 1976. Here he teaches that life which is a slow and continuous process of death has got to be well utilised. The individual soul has been given the golden key, the law of Karma, which is a wonderful law governing the whole universe. Swamiji has called upon the seekers to transform the outgoing psyche by a fresh and new behaviour-pattern which will be the antidote for spiritual ignorance. The restless nature of the mind is disciplined by the practice of Yoga. The mind is brought to a specific focal point. In the beginning that focal point is a divine object, a personal concept of the Impersonal Reality. Here the mind is united and divinised. The supreme mystical state comes in that state of total absorption. The mind becomes no-mind. Mind absorbed in the Reality is itself liberation. This is the Yoga of the Centre, the Yoga of luminous consciousness. Hatha Yoga and the various techniques of meditation are the Yoga of the circumference and the Yoga of the area of the circle. But the Yoga of the nucleus, that of awareness of being essentially God-centred and Truth-centred, requires no church, no temple, no incense and no altar. This is the

Yoga of the New Age that Chidananda preaches to modern men.

Swamiji's *Lectures on Raja Yoga* published in 1976 is a valuable supplement to his *Path to Blessedness*. The book comprises a series of lectures given at Beirut at the Yoga Santi Niketan in the spring of 1973 to a group of spiritual aspirants. Here, he has not brought forward merely an annotation of or commentary on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. He has given practical instructions on Yoga by the help of which one can be one's own psychiatrist.

Swamiji's instructions and message to earnest seekers have been published under the title Eternal Messages on the joyous occasion of his Diamond Jubilee. The central teaching, the keynote, in his messages is a call to everybody to realise the omnipresence of the Almighty. He instructs people always to work in the spirit of worship, with a sense of surrender unto Him. This is the Mantra, the eternal message of Bharatavarsha through Her apostles, which bestows salvation on man.

Some of the sublime teachings of Swamiji have been edited by Sri V.L. Nagaraj in five booklets in the *Chidananda Diamond Jubilee Series* in 1976. Swamiji's eternal divine consciousness, his guidelines on the secret of Karma Yoga, his teachings on practical Vedanta, his reliance on prayer for purity, and deepest devotion to Guru are wonderfully arranged in these series, which in a sense give the reader the quintessence of the teachings of His Holiness.

The Path Beyond Sorrow comprises his invaluable guidance to the seekers of the West. In 1960 Swamiji gave a number of discourses in the New World as the personal representative of the Holy Master and brought about a spiritual stir in that preponderately materialistic atmosphere. These discourses formed the body of the book which removes all misconceptions about Yoga and gives its central meaning in the light of Swamiji's

intuitive experience. He held that Yoga is not merely a psychophysical science, but a spiritual science which, when practised, transforms one's lower nature into divine consciousness.

Yoga Asanas do not constitute Yoga in the essential sense. They are, however, one of the limbs of Yoga which prepare the seeker to attain physical and mental health. Swamiji gave these instructions in his *Practical Guide to Yoga* in his sixtieth year. At this old age he demonstrated the exact Yogic postures for this guide book. He showed how all the techniques of relaxation in standing, lying and sitting postures create harmony in the physical, vital and mental sheaths of the human beings.

Swamiji's teachings have been printed in magazines and books, recorded in tapes and gramophone plates and broadcast through radio and television. Swamiji has given instruction in caves and Ashrams, delivered fiery speeches on the platforms before huge multitudes and presented pearls of wisdom in course of interviews with the seekers. He has given keynote speeches in the Parliament of Religions, addressed the brethren of the Sivananda fraternity in elevating Satsangs, revealed the esoteric meanings of scriptures to the orthodox thinkers and, above all, conveyed his personal message and blessings to all those who have needed his instructions and sought solace from him. He is, indeed, a world guide.

The teachings of Chidananda are not confined to Ashrams and disciples. Chidananda treasure house is open to everybody irrespective of differences of caste, creed, religion and sex; it is equally solicitous of all the seekers. Chidananda's teachings are not laden with scholastic jargon. They are not punctuated by pedantic Sanskrit or Latin quotations. They are not oriented towards metaphysical speculations. Chidananda literature is an ever-pure, holy stream trickling down from crystallised knowledge, a veritable Jnana Ganga, taking its origin in Sivananda, the towering saint of the

Himalayas. It flows on and on, quenching the thirst of millions all over the world.

Chidananda does not keep himself enthroned on a forbidding height. He is ever ready to descend down, to bend low to the level of each ordinary mortal as a friend and guide. His speeches are not conventional kinds of sermons. They are direct, sincere appeals to one and all. It is said that great poetry communicates before it is understood. So does the speech of Chidananda. Before it is understood through an intellectual process it penetrates into the heart and the message is instantaneously carried to the inquisitive listener. This happens because his words of wisdom spring from complete realisation and they jet forth under the pressure of love and compassion.

Chidananda has not established a school of his own. He has made himself a thoroughly de-individualised instrument in the hands of God and Gurudev. He begins all his writings, speeches and prayers in the name of the Holy Master. Such beginnings as "Reverential prostrations at the feet of my Yogi Guru, late revered Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj" in his latest work Practical Guide to Yoga and such conclusions as, "Here is your Guru, your Master, the Messenger and the citizen of the world" in his earliest work Light Fountain are the permanent styles of his address at all times and on all occasions. By his own examples he teaches the real spirit of dedication. In his own words, "Sivananda's invisible spiritual presence is guiding me even now".[20]

There is a common feature in all his writings. He begins with a note on Seva and Paropakara, gives emphasis on the remembrance of Lords' Name, asks the seekers to spiritualise the thought force through Yoga and conducts his message to the ultimate truth of

20 *Philosophy, Psychology and Practice of Yoga, Ponder These Truths, A Call to Liberation, Renunciation—A Life of Surrender and Trust and Light on the Yoga Way of Life are some of the other works of Sri Swamiji Maharaj.*

Vedanta. The total effect is always electrifying, overpowering and deeply gratifying.

Serve, Love, Give, Purify, Meditate, Realise. These pithy, forceful teachings of Sivananda are imbedded in all the works of Chidananda. Constantly remember God. Cultivate virtues. Spiritualise all activities. These three essentials of the Master's teachings run like a silver thread in all his writings and light up the most simple and direct path to the God within.

THE LIFE DIVINE

The story of Swami Chidananda has been a story of total divinisation of the human personality. It is a story of silent service and complete self-effacement. On the basis of the profound authority of his personal experience and direct realisation, therefore, this peerless saint of the Himalayas could proclaim to the world of seekers: "Yoga is not only in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. It is in every moment." His life at every moment glows with an immaculate godliness.

The life of Chidananda is a life of holy service. Service and sacrifice have been its cardinal features. His Samskara was such that high spiritual virtues were instinctive volitions with him. Thus, while in his teens, this saint of boundless mercy had already taken upon himself the awe-inspiring task of being a father and a doctor to the unfortunate lepers who were spurned and hated by all their fellow beings. Nobility, humility, purity and compassion came naturally to him. Thoughts of a prosperous material career never allured him. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth and brought up in the purple. But riches and worldly status did not mean a thing to him. Even in adolescence he was far above the snares of the senses. Service and sacrifice alone made him happy. Association with saints comprised his only craving. Meditation was his only passion. Worship was his only pleasure.

In the very prime of his youth this born Siddha felt that he was being roasted in the fire of Samsara. And so, when the opportune moment came, he promptly renounced his hearth and home. On a sacred full-moon day he met his Master by the side of the holy Ganga at Rishikesh. He took the ochre garb and linked himself to

the hoary monastic order. For more than a decade he merged himself in intense Seva and Sadhana and shone as an illumined sage. For another decade during the life time of the Master, he carried the message of Yoga and Vedanta to the New World. Returning, he voluntarily sank into seclusion leading the life of an isolated wandering monk. He was indifferent even to the order of Sannyas. He moved freely like an Avadhut, free from all fetters, depending on God and blissfully dwelling in the plane of God-awareness.

At this stage the Cosmic Will brought him back to the plane of Loka Sangraha, the highest spiritual service. The Holy Master Swami Sivananda threw off his mortal coil and had merged in the Absolute. The task of spiritual leadership of the Master's divine mission, therefore, fell upon the shoulders of his chosen disciple. Thus the world renouncer grew into the most dynamic of the holy workers in the modern world.

Chidananda serves indefatigably, through all hours and all seasons. He serves the Lord in this cosmic form. He serves his Master through his divine mission. He lives in the world of Rama. How Rama came into his life is an instructive lesson to every seeker. To him in his childhood He came as the idol Kodanda Rama, whom he worshipped and in whom he had his whole being. At a later stage, He came to him in the shape of the unfortunate lepers. Then a time came when the Lord appeared before him in the form of the inspired words of Ramdas. Next, the life of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa rose before him as a beckoning ideal. Saints and mystics blessed him. At last, the Lord gave him Darshan in the form of his Sadguru. Sivananda entered into his very being. He was filled with devotion to Guru. Sivananda dwelt in him and he dwelt in Sivananda. The two became one. In the words of Swami Krishnanandaji: "The legacy which he (Chidanandaji) has imbibed from Sri Gurudev is hundred per cent. We see in him all the miraculous and wondrous character of Gurudev."

Sarvam Ramamayam Jagat. Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagat. Vaasudevah Sarvam Iti. Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma. These are the formulas of his living and the fundamental recipes in all situations in life. He beholds the whole world as the manifestation of divinity. The World is Guru. Life is discipleship. Therefore, one has to live one's life to serve the world and learn wisdom from the world itself. This is the Dharma that leads to Moksha. This is the keynote of Chidananda's message to mankind. He conveys this message both by personal example and ringing precepts. Therefore, the master in him has courted a life of humble discipleship. He ever considers himself merely as the servant of Gurudev. He considers his own disciples as the disciples of his Holy Master, nay Narayana Himself. He is the crest-jewel among the saints of the modern times. But he bows down before everybody. He prostrates himself with the utmost reverence not only before his elders but before the lowliest of men.

With inexhaustible compassion he serves and loves all living creatures on this earth. When he had reached the pinnacle of spiritual attainments, his heart melted at the sorry spectacle of his fellow-beings pathetically enmeshed in trivialities. Regardless of discomforts and difficulties he dedicated himself to the task of liberating them. He knew that men commit errors through ignorance. Therefore, he did not look down upon them or admonish them, but stooped with love to raise them up. His love is boundless. It stretches out to embrace beasts, birds and even insects.

Chidananda is the pure prism radiating the rays of Sanatana Dharma. Being an absolutely immaculate holy personality and a realised soul he is endowed with incalculable spiritual force. His very presence constitutes an uplifting experience, dispels the doubts of struggling seekers and infuses into them a new spiritual

vigour. Numerous are his disciples. Numberless are the people who, though not initiated, take him as their Sadguru. But this great master of love and compassion moves as an ordinary humble student among them all. He is a born Siddha but continues to conduct himself as a seeker.

Godmen who scaled supernormal heights have left their indelible impress on the minds of men. Buddha left behind him the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. Sankara bequeathed to us the lesson of Ultimate Reality. Chaitanya gave us the ecstasy of Nama Sankirtan. Sivananda gave to humanity the fourfold Sadhana of service, devotion, meditation and illumination. In this unbroken line, Chidananda by his being and doing teaches us to seek the Creator not in some unknown mystic plane but in the midst of active creation itself. He has bequeathed to humanity the Yoga of the Centre, the Yoga of luminous consciousness, the Yoga of service of living beings and worship of God. He is a Nitya Nirantara Pujari worshipping God at all times. He gives stirring exhortation to his fellow-men to live the Divine Life. Most solicitously and solemnly he counsels:

Wake up at dawn each day to salute the Virat Svarup. Bow down in adoration unto Him before you start the day. Go through the day serenely, full of happiness and contentment. There is nothing to condemn in this world. Change your angle of vision. Forego a grudge. Forgive an enemy. Stop anxiety and smile gently unto yourself. Feel that the whole world is the manifestation of the Lord and you are serving the Lord in all these names and forms. Convert life into Yoga. Strive to be a Sadachari and Paropakari. God walks with the simple, reveals Himself through the sufferer, gives understanding to the noble and keeps His Grace from the haughty. So renounce ego, cultivate virtues and be free.

Keep the mind always calm and peaceful. This is the secret of overcoming obstacles of the mind. Weigh all your words before they are spoken. Speak a few words only. This will conserve energy, give peace of mind and inner strength. Speak your love. Speak it again. Speak it still again. Speak it still once again. Never allow the mind to be completely extrovert. Be the conqueror of your mind, the subduer of your desires and a master of your destiny, for you are the master.

Gurudev Sivananda came to awaken you. Forget that you are the body. Remember that you are pure consciousness. Slumber no more. Be as humble as a blade of grass. Serve. Love. Give. Purify. Meditate. Realise. Be good. Do good. Be kind. Be compassionate. Divinity is your birthright. Unfold it by regular Sadhana. Isavasyamidam Sarvam—The whole world is pervaded by God. Therefore, serve humanity and seek divinity.

These are the ringing notes in the message of Chidananda. Like the great Master he equally emphasises: Do not merely believe, but **be** and **live**.

The great purpose of human life is God-realisation. Plants, animals, birds and insects grow and die. They do not evolve by conscious endeavour. They are not endowed by their Creator with the consciousness to discriminate between good and evil. But human life is a priceless gift of God. The highway of human life, however, is a razor-edged path. We are blinded by the senses which have robbed off our conscience. Our pitfalls are many. In this great and difficult highway of life now and then there appears a divine messenger as a friend and guide to support and sustain. He is the Guru. He belongs to the entire humanity. He knocks at your innermost chamber and compassionately solicits: "Oh blessed friend! When will you wake up from the deep sleep of ignorance... Come. Come. Wake up now. Break through

this dream. Claim your birthright, recognise your true identity. Know your Real Nature right here and now and enter into the experience of divine joy, peace, wisdom which is your Eternal Svarupa."

This is the divine call of Chidananda to the human race. May we respond to this thrilling exhortation and say like Arjuna in the "Song Celestial": "Karishye Vachanam Tava— As Thou sayest so shall I act."

OM TAT SAT

THE UNIVERSAL PRAYER

SRI SWAMI SIVANANDA

O Adorable Lord of mercy and love,
Salutations and prostrations unto Thee;
Thou art omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient;
Thou art Satchidananda.
Thou art the Indweller of all beings.

Grant us an understanding heart,
Equal vision, balanced mind,
Faith, devotion and wisdom;
Grant us inner spiritual strength
to resist temptations
And to control the mind.
Free us from egoism, lust, greed, hatred,
anger and jealousy;
Fill our hearts with divine virtues.

Let us behold Thee in all these names and forms;
Let us serve Thee in all these names and forms;
Let us ever remember Thee;
Let us ever sing Thy glories;
Let Thy Name be ever on our lips;
Let us abide in Thee for ever and ever.

Om Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!

SWAMI SIVANANDA

GLOSSARY

A

Abhisheka: Bathing or sprinlking with water of a Deity to whom worship is offered

Abhokta: Non-enjoyer; non-experiencer

Acharya: A spiritual guide or preceptor; a teacher

Adi Guru: First teacher

Adhyatma Jnana Jyoti: Light of spiritual wisdom

Adhyatmic: Spiritual

Advaita Sthiti: The state of non-duality

Aham: `I'; the ego

Ajnata Sanchara: Travelling incognito

Akarta: Non-doer

Amanitva: Humility

Ananda Kutir: Abode of Bliss; Gurudev Sivananda's hermitage

Annakshetra: Kitchen cum dining place

Annaprasana: The ceremony of giving a new born child food to eat for the first time

Antaryamin: Indweller

Archana: Worship paid to deities

Archavatara: Image of the divine incarnation intended to be worshipped

Arpanam: Offering

Artha: Wealth; riches

Atman: Soul

Atma Jnani: He who knows the knowledge of the Self

Avadhuta: An ascetic who has renounced all worldly attachments and connections; the highest stage of asceticism

B

Bai: Usual surname of an Indian lady

Bala Krishna: Lord Krishna as a child

Bhajan: Recitation of devotional songs in praise of the Lord

Bhakta: Devotee

Bhakti Yoga: Yoga of Devotion

Bharatiya Parampara: Indian tradition

Bhav: Deep feeling

Brahmachari: Celibate

Brahmacharya: Celibacy

Brahmamuhurta: Early part of the day, usually 4.00 A.M.

Brahmanishtha: Absorbed in the contemplation of the Supreme Spirit

Brahma Vichar: Enquiry of Brahman

Brahma Vidya Guru: Spiritual preceptor

C

Charanamrita: Water in which the feet of a Deity have been washed

Chela: Disciple; Sishya

Chitta: Subtler part of the mind

D

Daivi Sampat: Divine Virtue

Dakshina: Gift; remuneration offered with love

Darshan: Vision

Devara Nama: Devotional Songs

Devi: A respectful title applied to a lady; also a goddess

Dhanvantari: Physician of the gods in the Indian mythology

Dharma: Religion; righteousness

Diksha: Initiation

Divya Nam: Divine Name

G

Gadadhar Vishnu: Lord Vishnu holding a club

Ganga-ki-Dhara: The stream of Ganga

Gaudiya: Relating to Bengal; particularly to a school of Vaishnavism which accepts Chaitanya as Lord Himself

Gopala Krishna: Lord Krishna as a cowherd boy

Grihasti: Householder

Guru: Preceptor; Holy Master

Guru Mantra: Mantra imparted by Guru

H

Hari Katha: Religious discourse, particularly about Lord Vishnu

Hatha Yoga: A system of Yoga for gaining control over the physical body and Prana; system of Asanas, Pranayamas, Bandhas, Mudras and Kriyas

I

Isavasyamidam Sarvam: All this is pervaded by the Lord

Ishta Deva: Tutelary Deity

Isvararpana: Offering to the Lord

J

Janmarasi: Nativity sign of the Zodiac

Janmashtami: The eighth day of the dark half of Bhadrapada being the day of advent of Lord Sri Krishna

Japa Yoga: Yoga of repetition of God's Name or a Mantra again and again

Jayanti: Birthday jubilee

Jijnasu: Inquisitive; desirous of knowing

Jita Krodha: One who has conquered anger

Jiva: Individual soul with ego

Jivanmukta: One who has attained salvation in this life

Jnani: God-realised soul; Vedantin; learned man

K

Kirtan: Singing of the Lord's Name

Kama: Desire; wish; passion

Karttikeya: Son of Lord Siva

Ketu: The descending node; ninth planet

Kevala Advaita: Pure monism

Kodanda Rama: Lord Rama holding a bow

Kripa: Grace

Krishnarpanam: Offering to Lord Krishna

Kula Guru: Family preceptor

Kundalini Yoga: Yoga by which the mystic serpent-power or the primordial cosmic energy is made to rise and pass through several psychic centres till it reaches Sahasrara

Kusht Nivaraka Samiti: Leprosy relief Association

L

Loka Sangraha: Uplift of the world

Loka Siksha: Spiritual instruction

M

Madhava: One of the Names of Lord Vishnu

Magha: Name of a star

Maha Dasa: Major period of a planet in horoscope

Mahamrityunjaya Mantra: A sacred hymn of the Vedas pertaining to Lord Siva, the conqueror of death

Mahatma: Great Soul; also refers to Gandhiji

Manohar Vilas: Charming abode; the name of the abode of nativity of Swami Chidananda

Mantra: Sacred syllable or word or set of words through the repetition and reflection of which one attains Self-realisation

Marathi: Language of the Maharashtrians

Maryada: Propriety; decorum

Math: Monastery

Moksha: Salvation

Mauna: Silence

Mumukshu: Desirous of liberation

N

Nada Brahma: Sound symbol of the Absolute

Nama: Name of the Lord

Namaskar: Salutation

Nama Swarup: Embodiment of Divine Name

Nami: Lord Himself identical with His Name

Nataraj: Lord Siva as a dancer

Nija Swarupa: One's own essential nature; Satchidananda

Nimitta Matram: Instrument only

Nirvikalpa Samadhi: The superconscious state where there is no mind or "Trikuti" or any idea

Nishprapancha Avastha: A state of awareness beyond the illusory world

Nivritti: Renunciation; stepping back from worldly activity

Nitya Nirantara Pujari: Worshipper at all times

Niyama: The second step in Raja Yoga comprising purification, contentment, penances, study of scriptures and worship of God

O

Otaprota: All permeating

P

Paduka: Wooden Sandal

Papa: Father

Paropakara: Doing good to others

Parivrajaka: Wandering mendicant

Patanjali: A seer who propounded the system of Yoga

Payasam: A mixture of boiled rice, milk, ghee and sugar

Prakriti: Nature

Pranayama: Control of breath

Pundit: A learned man; scholar

Puja: Worship

Punyabhumi: Sacred land

Purana: Mythology

Purnima: Full moon day

Purvashrama: The earlier life of a monk before renunciation

R

Rahu: The ascending node; the eighth planet

Raja Yoga: The Yoga of eight limbs leading to the superconscious state called Samadhi; the system propounded by Patanjali

Rishi: Sage; seer of the Truth

S

Sadachara: Righteous living

Sadguru: A God-realised teacher

Sadhak: Spiritual practitioner

Sadhana: Spiritual practice

Sadhana Chatushtaya: Fourfold spiritual practice in Vedanta comprising Viveka, Vairagya, Shat Sampat and Mumukshutva

Sahaja Avastha: Spontaneous stage of highest divine experience

Sahaja Jnani: A man of Self-knowledge and not of mere learning

Samadhi: Superconscious state; also a tomb

Samsara: The process of worldly life; life through repeated births and deaths

Samskara: Impression of the past birth over the mind

Samyama Saptaha Mahavrata: Great vow of a week-long spiritual discipline

Sanatana Dharma: Eternal Religion usually identified with Hinduism

Sandhya Vandana: A religious ablution and prayer among the twice-born of the Hindus performed in morning, noon and evening

Sankalpa: Resolve; desire

Santa Samahita Chitta: The quiescent, absorbed inner state of mind

Sannyasi: Monk

Saranagati: Surrender to the Lord

Sarkheel: Treasury Official

Sarvam Ramamayam Jagat: The whole world is pervaded by Lord Rama

Sarvam Vishnumayam Jagat: The whole world is pervaded by Vishnu

Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma: All this is pervaded by Brahman alone

Sashtanga Deergha Dandavat: Prostration by bowing down through the eight limbs namely by touching the forehead, chest, two palms, two knees and two feet on the ground

Sastra(s): Scripture(s)

Satsanga: Association with the wise

Sat Sankalpa: Right resolve

Satyagrahi: One who takes resort to the unique practice of Satyagraha, popularised by Mahatma Gandhi

Satya: Truth

Savikalpa Samadhi: Samadhi with the triad of knower, knowledge and known

Seva: Service

Seva Yatra: Tour of spiritual service

Siddha: A Perfected Yogi

Siddhi: Perfection; Psychic power

Simha: Name of a sign in the Zodiac; Lion

Smarana: God-remembrance

Sthitaprajna: Man of illumined consciousness, with equal vision and balanced mind; he, who is unshakably established in superconsciousness; sage of steady wisdom

Sukshma Samskara: Subtle impression

Svadhyaya: Study of scriptures

Svarupa: Essential nature; Reality; Sat-Chit-Ananda; the essential nature of Brahman; True Nature of Being

T

Tantra Yoga: A particular path of Sadhana laying great stress upon Japa of Mantra and other esoteric Upasanas

Tapas: Penance

Tapascharya: The act of doing penance

Tapasvi: One who is practising penance

Tapasvini: A lady practising penance

Tapobhumi: The place of penance

Tirtha Yatra: Pilgrimage

Titiksha: Endurance

Trigunatita: One who has transcended the three qualities of Sattva, Rajas and Tamas

U

Upanayana: Sacred thread ceremony

V

Vasana: Desire

Vaikuntha: The abode of Lord Vishnu

Vaishnava: Worshipper of Vishnu

Vaasudevah Sarvam: All this is Vaasudeva

Viman: A heavenly car

Viraja Homa: The sacrifice performed at the time of Sannyasa initiation

Virakta: One who has disgust for all worldly things; dispassionate

Virat Swarup: God in His immanent form

Vrischika Lagna: Scorpio ascendent in a horoscope

Vritti: Thought-wave; mental modification

Vyavahara: Behaviour; conduct

Y

Yatra: Journey; tour

Yoga: Union with the Supreme Being

Yogi: One who practises Yoga

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BRAHMARPANAMASTU

SRI SWAMI CHIDANANDA

AN APOSTLE OF PEACE AND EMBODIMENT OF QUINTESSENCE OF INDIA'S SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE

Revered Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji's worthy spiritual successor has been referred to as follows, "If one wants to see boldness of spirit behind a slender appearance, irrevertible command of heart behind a benign face, unwavering peace of mind behind dynamism of action, impersonal detachment behind personal love and care—all at once in a single person, one cannot do better than meet Swami Chidananda."

Born on 24th September, 1916, into a wealthy Brahmin family in South India, Swami Chidananda absorbed love for tradition and respect for rituals. At Loyola College, Madras (now Chennai), Swamiji had a brilliant scholastic career. The ideals and teachings of Jesus made a deep impression in his heart, and he was able to synthesize them with all that is best and noble in Hindu Culture. The two profound influences in Swamiji's life were the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and the example of his Gurudev, Sri Swami Sivananda. He joined Gurudev in 1943 and from then on the Ashram and the lofty ideals of The Divine Life Society became home and field of service for him.

Swami Chidananda was born with an insatiable zeal to serve the sick and the suffering. Even in childhood he built huts for lepers on the lawns of his home and looked after them as though they were deities.

Swami Sivananda said about his spiritual son and beloved disciple:

"Chidananda is a Jivanmukta, a great Saint, an ideal Yogi, a Para-Bhakta and a great sage. Swami Chidananda is all this and much more. He was a great Yogi and Saint in his previous birth itself. His lectures are the outpouring of his saintly heart, the revelations of intuitive wisdom. And he is a practical Vedantin, his words have tremendous power. He is born to fulfil a great mission."

Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj attained Mahasamadhi on 28th August, 2008.

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